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TRAUMA-INFORMED WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH: A CASE STUDY

by

Melissa Erickson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate in Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

November 2019

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation in honor of my two children, Devin and Adam, and my extended family and friends who supported me in my journey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank-you to my mom Karen and two boys, Devin and Adam, for your daily support and encouragement, that was the fuel that propelled me forward.

A special thank-you to Trish Harvey, for your expertise and timely feedback. You challenged, encouraged, and supported me throughout this process making me a better researcher.

Thank-you to my Dissertation Committee, Trish Harvey, Megan Septar, and Krisin Krych for your wisdom and expertise. I am inspired by your dedication to my topic and guidance through the writing process.

To my research participants, I appreciate your willingness to participate and engage in the conversations around trauma. Your willingness to be candid with your thoughts and experiences adds to the larger context of our profession. I feel fortunate to work with a wonderful district and dedicated staff that care so passionately about kids.

Last but not least, a special thank-you goes out to Jessica Murphey. I feel lucky and honored that we were able to take this journey together. This has been one of the *top moments* we have shared throughout the years. You inspire me every day and I am fortunate to call you friend! I look forward to the continued work we will do together.

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Abstract

Erickson, M. Trauma-Informed Whole School Approach - A Case Study. (2019).

Today, trauma is known to affect two-thirds of children, making it a high probability that students affected by trauma are sitting in every classroom around the United States (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Cole et al. (2005) described schools as being, "...significant communities for children and teachers" (p. 1). This poses a challenge for schools across the United States to know how to engage students who are affected by trauma in their learning. Trauma leads to adverse effects on how a student will learn, behave, and respond socially and emotionally in the classroom (Cole et al., 2005). Therefore, educators need to have understanding and skills about trauma and trauma-sensitive learning environments that address the needs of children who have or are experiencing trauma.

This case study was developed to explore one rural district's transition to a trauma-informed environment. The guiding questions leading the case study were, what are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices? The data was collected and analyzed applying grounded theory seeking patterns on perceptions, understandings, and skills.

Key Words: Trauma-Sensitive, Trauma-Informed, Trauma-Informed Whole School Approach, Trauma, Case Study, Toxic Stress, Childhood Trauma, ACE

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Teachers understand the expectations to educate students at high academic levels, however, they also recognize the importance of meeting students' social and emotional needs in order for students to reach optimal learning. Emerging research has afforded us with knowledge into the devastating impact childhood trauma has on students and student learning. Additionally, research has given us overwhelming evidence that society, schools, and teachers need to address the impact trauma has on a child's development (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Trauma's implication on a student's ability to learn, form healthy relationships with teachers and peers, and be resilient in the face of adversity can be devastating as they grow and mature (Cole, O'Brien, Gadd, Ristuccia, Wallace, & Gregory, 2005). Therefore, it is vital that childhood trauma is addressed at the school level (Cole et al., 2005; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Exploring topics such as trauma and trauma-sensitive environments add new layers of learning that equip teachers to give their best to students every day. My interest in this topic is to investigate effective ways to lead educational organizations in creating trauma-sensitive practices where students can be heard, safe, and able to learn. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) implores schools to become a place for traumatized students to forge strong relationships with caring adults in a supportive, predictable, and safe environment. Further evidence shows us that safe and predictable school environments can reduce trauma's negative impact on students (Cole et al., 2005; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Educators work daily with students, however, they are

not trained in treating mental health and should never be a replacement for mental health care. On the other hand, they have daily contact with students and they need to be able to recognize and work with students that struggle with trauma. I conducted a case study that examined one district's secondary schools' implementation of a trauma-informed environment. This qualitative study gathered a deeper understanding of what teachers need for training and professional development that will help to inform how schools can implement trauma-informed environments and lead educational organizations through the process of implementation. The research questions are: What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

To reduce the negative impact trauma has on students, it is important for educators to understand trauma, how it affects behavior, and how it impacts a student's ability to learn (Cole et al, 2005; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). From a neurobiology perspective, trauma alters the child's developing brain and affects the nervous system (Walkley & Cox, 2013) leading to a state of toxic stress which presents negatively on how the child responds to learning and the learning environment. Sitler (2008) reasoned that "Developing a pedagogy of awareness can help a teacher to reframe perceptions and consequently, help disengaged and help difficult students reinvest in their learning" (p. 119). In order to do that, I want to understand best practices around trauma-sensitive

environments and investigate how teachers' expressed skills, mindset, and training support their work with students in trauma.

Statement of Problem

Every school and classroom across the United States are impacted by trauma. Today, trauma is known to affect two-thirds of children, making it a high probability that students affected by trauma are sitting in every classroom around the United States (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Cole et al. (2005) described schools as being, "...significant communities for children and teachers" (p. 1). This poses a challenge for schools across the United States to know how to engage students who are affected by trauma in their learning. Trauma leads to adverse effects on how a student will learn, behave, and respond socially and emotionally (Cole et al., 2005). Therefore, educators need to have understanding and skills about trauma and trauma-sensitive learning environments that address the needs of children who have or are experiencing trauma.

Trauma affects the brain development of a child during some of the most crucial times in their development which affects behavior, learning, and peer relationships. McInerney and McKlindon (2014) stated that "Psychological changes to children's brains as well as emotional and behavioral responses to trauma have the potential to interfere with children's learning, school engagement, and academic success" (p. 3). This epidemic impacts learning, social interactions, and emotional regulation leading to multiple behavior, motivation, and trust issues throughout their school years. Trauma responses can impact how teachers and peers respond to a traumatized student leading to further shape that student's perceived world (Cole et al., 2005). This can be a struggle in

a school setting for teachers, administrators, and their peers. Furthermore, schools run the risk of re-traumatizing students when they discipline behavior that may be more of a trauma response (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Students in trauma are unable to do the learning that their untraumatized peers are able to perform, which leads to an inequitable education for traumatized students. Furthermore, when trauma is not recognized it can lead to years of misdiagnosed action plans that are ineffective, only to perpetuate a student falling further behind.

Another problem is when a student does not get the help, studies show that trauma can manifest into larger problems in adulthood. For example, in the 1998 Adverse Childhood Experience study (ACEs), they linked childhood trauma to several negative outcomes in adulthood, such as risky health behaviors, chronic health behaviors, and even early death (Felitti et al., 1998).

Therefore, it is important for schools to build capacity around trauma-sensitive learning environments. A learning environment that is trauma-sensitive engages all students in the learning through supportive adults working towards building student agency. This would create a culture that is trauma-sensitive and ensure students get the support they need (Oehlberg, 2008). Schools that build pedagogy around student agency and social-emotional skills can create learning environments in which children can be supported in order to heal, grow, and learn.

Another issue schools face is that teachers rely on support staff, such as administrators, school social workers, counselors, and school-based psychologists, to step in when needed. However, schools usually have only one or two positions allocated to

mental health per school. This is problematic especially for rural schools where you may only have one counselor per a thousand students. According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) (as cited in Plumb et al., 2016), the recommended ratio for school counselor in regular education is 1 to 250 students and in a high needs school, it is recommended to have a ratio of 1 to 50 students (p. 48). According to the data pulled from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics in 2016-17, "Minnesota current ratio is 659/1 ... one of the highest student-to-school counselor ratios" (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES, 2017]).

Trauma affects students' ability to trust, form relationships, self-regulate emotions, and work with others collaboratively (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Souers & Hall, 2016). These can manifest into behavior problems that the teachers and administrators need to address. When schools are unaware of trauma and how to work with students in trauma it can lead to the child being re-traumatized all over again with harsh discipline practices (Craig, 2017). The child can then become increasingly defiant leading to a power struggle, breaking down trust even further. On the flip side, students in trauma can also become quiet, withdrawn, and apathetic to their environment and school expectations leaving the teacher or administrator at a loss on how to motivate learning (Craig, 2016). From a teacher's vantage point, both student responses can be frustrating when lessons need to be taught, standards need to be met, and the workload is high. Building awareness and skills help guide schools in working with students, breaking down the walls and activating the learning that needs to occur.

Additionally, educators are not trained to deal with trauma. Another staggering fact is statistically, teachers have experienced their own childhood trauma and deal with their own trauma responses which further impacts their interaction with traumatized students (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016). Therefore, it is vital for teachers to be self-reflective of their own beliefs and actions in order to provide healthy and secure environments for students that have experienced trauma (Souers & Hall, 2016).

In school systems, it is important to train educators to do the work of supporting students in trauma (Craig, 2017). All school personnel need to know how to monitor trauma responses (Craig, 2017), deal with escalating behaviors due to trauma triggers (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016), and get students in their optimal state of learning (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016). Students also need safe, secure, and consistent environments that support their needs (Souers & Hall, 2016). We want all students to forge strong relationships with caring adults in a supportive, predictable, and safe environment (Cole et al., 2005) and reduce the negative impact trauma has on students (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine one district's understanding of trauma and trauma-informed learning environments that align with research. Furthermore, it examines educators' perceptions of the impact trauma has on how students learn. This study will take a further look at how educators incorporate trauma-informed skills in actual classroom practice. The examination of educators' expressed perceptions, understandings, and skills will help in the understanding of how research is applied in

actual practice. Educators, meaning teachers and administrators, have a direct impact on student success. Educators make decisions daily that impact the classroom, the curriculum used, discipline policies created, and decisions on how students should act. This study will further lead to a greater understanding of the support educators need through professional development to incorporate a district whole-school approach of trauma-informed environments.

My Belief

One strong belief, that has been the catalyst for me moving into an instructional coaching position, is that the teacher has the strongest impact on student learning than any other factor in education. Marzano (2007) reported that after decades of studies on what demonstrates effective schools and greatest impact on student achievement, it has become clear that it is teachers, stating, "... the one factor that surfaced as the single most influential component of an effective school is the individual teachers within the school" (p. 1). Therefore, developing teachers is essential for our students. According to Tucker and Stronge (2005), "Years of research on teacher quality support the fact that effective teachers not only make students feel good about school and learning but also that their work actually results in increased student achievement" (p. 2). My teaching career has been centered around teachers, creating and leading embedded professional development (EPD) in order to foster strong student-centered classrooms. Knight (2009) defined job-embedded as, "The professional learning experiences facilitated by coaches are usually directly applicable to teachers' classrooms" (p. 18). Therefore, my hope for this study is to help guide the district in the work of trauma-informed practices to increase

student achievement in the future. Through a deeper understanding of trauma, combined with my belief in developing the teacher, creates the significance to train teachers in the context of classroom skills that impact classroom environment and practice due to their influence on students and students' ability to learn. As Souers and Hall (2016) stated, "...teacher quality is the number-one school factor determining student success" (p. 35). With this in mind, educators have the ability to get students who have otherwise checked out, into a state of learning through creating caring and predictable environments (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016). Furthermore, they have the ability to forge strong healthy relationships with students in order to reduce the negative impact of trauma (Cole et al., 2005; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014) and forge new neural pathways that support healthy development essential for the students we serve (Souers & Hall, 2016).

My Background

Journey to education. When I began teaching, education looked different than it does today. It was the beginning of the era of standards and accountability from a federal level. I entered the education field young and eager to make a difference in students' lives. Looking back at my first teaching job, I found that I naturally gravitated towards students who frustrated the teachers that I worked alongside. Usually, they were students that did not go down the traditional path. I suspect it was because I could relate to the struggles they faced. My own experience in education was similar. Starting out in my career I did not identify these students as having trauma, however, from my current vantage point, I can see that it was likely the case. I saw them struggle with regulating

their anger, skipping school, disrupting class, and even the use of illegal substances on school grounds.

Understanding what I did not understand. As an educator, I have always believed and understood that students cannot learn unless their social and emotional needs were met first. This awareness was most likely from my own childhood struggles and not from a vantage point of research. I struggled to stay focused and motivated throughout my adolescent years. My response to school made many teachers assume I was unmotivated, lazy, and disinterested in learning. Furthermore, my distrust of adults and a need to *go it alone* eventually resulted in my dropping out of school altogether. I did not understand what I did not understand.

Windows, doors, and mirrors. My doctoral journey has given me the opportunity to examine my world through windows, doors, and mirrors. The purpose of a window is to see out into the world to gain perspective. Looking out has provided me an opportunity to see other perspectives from their lived experience and as a result of this, I have taken the opportunity to, as Brown (2017) would say, *lean in, be curious* and learn. I have gained insight that my perspective can be limited by my experiences and looking at it from another's lens can change the whole story. A clear window moment for me came while attending my Equity and Social Justice Policy class; in our small group work, I shared an experience as a white midwest high school student who traveled with a performing group to the south. We were hot and ready for some fun, when we had a break we drove to the nearest community center and proceeded to jump into the pool. Soon after we jumped in we realized we were the only white people in the pool since all

the black people had gotten out and were staring at us. The perspective I carried from that experience into adulthood was that the people in the pool were upset or annoyed that we just jumped in. However, one of the leaders in my small group provided me a window: as an African American who grew up in the south, she offered that perhaps people left the pool because of the racial tensions that existed and still exists. She challenged me to consider the idea that they may have exited the pool as a protective measure. This had not even crossed my mind. As a white middle-class female from the midwest, I have lived a life where the world fit my race and demographics. My lived experience was limited to a lack of understanding of the racial tension that exists.

Against this new backdrop of learning, I have been able to look in the *mirror* and analyze my own lived experiences with my new learning. As a leader, this has guided me in identifying my own positionality and biases, further challenging me to create new structures of thinking. As *doors* open in life I will walk through with the confidence that I will continue to learn and *lean in*. As a researcher I cannot separate myself from my work, therefore, it is important to continue to grow. As a teacher, leader, researcher, and scholar, I will continue to expand and grow as I walk forward in the work I do.

My leadership journey is not typical of most educators, yet my journey has led me to this place, talking about this topic. At workshops or conferences, conversations with educators usually lead to a discussion around why we chose the education field. In those conversations, generalizations are made that all teachers teach because we were good at school. These assumptions cannot be further from my truth as an educator. During the school year, I witness on occasion a frustrated teacher talk about a student. For brief

moments, I realize I was likely that student when I was in school. As I have looked in the *mirror* and *reflected* on my own educational journey, I am reminded of the many messages that I perceived as a student, maybe from a frustrated teacher or a trauma lens, nonetheless, it was my perception and it had an impact.

My school experience as a student was a sea of adults that I needed to navigate. As an elementary student, I was labeled shy, however, I believe it was more of my fear of adults that made this label for me. I would be very talkative with my friends and as soon as an adult walked into the room I would freeze up, avoid them, and stop talking. I was a master at watching an adult's body language. The years I had crabby, mean teachers I struggled to participate, pay attention, or speak. Teachers claimed that I spent most of my time daydreaming in class and not focused on my work. I skated through my elementary years, I did not cause trouble and I was a master at always knowing where the adults were so I could stay invisible.

As I got older, my quiet ways became more angry, rebellious, tough, and posturing through middle school and high school. My ninth grade year I had a report card full of F's, 47 absent days, and a lot of angry teachers. Teachers felt I was lazy and unmotivated. Every year was a struggle and I barely made it to 11th grade. Once I entered 11th grade, I believed that my only option was to drop out of school and that is what I did. That moment was defining for me. I was a high school dropout with no idea what I was going to do.

At this time in my life I had one adult that stepped up in my life and told me that I could do better. She believed in me and saw something that I struggled to see.

Furthermore, she showed me a future beyond my current circumstances if I was willing to work hard. That is when I decided that I was going to make my own life going forward. The next year I enrolled in 11th grade for a second time which was not easy for this angry, rebellious, tough, and posturing teenager. As I enrolled I met a new school counselor and she encouraged me, helped me with schedules, and talked to teachers when I struggled to. I had two adults who encouraged and supported me and this changed the trajectory of my life! My choice to pursue the field of education was largely due to my own personal experience as a student.

I have now been in the education field for twenty plus years and I have experienced the vantage point of teachers beyond the one I held as a student. What I have observed is teachers pouring everything into their teaching and their students. This manifests in ways such as going to conferences to learn the newest research, talking to colleagues to collaborate new methods of teaching, learning new technology tools to use for student feedback and engagement, and really trying to connect the learning to their students. Through all of this, it is still a challenge to connect and teach every child. Some students come to school with more than most teachers feel equipped to deal with and have very different backgrounds to relate to. In my observations, this can sometimes lead to feeling sorry for the student, therefore, dropping the rigor of learning as a way to help the students or being so hard on them the child has no chance to be successful. It is a delicate dance between teaching content and teaching social and emotional skills, teaching is truly an art form.

As I examine my positionality I am defined by my experiences, however, this is not a stationary position. As we learn and grow, we know better and do better. Therefore, as a researcher, I am compelled to examine my district's understanding of trauma and trauma-sensitive environments. In the future, this study will provide insight into producing high quality embedded professional development (EPD) for the district. In order to do that we need to develop a deeper understanding of the district's educators. My research question is: What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

Professional Experience

I have devoted my educational career to working with teachers in a coaching and embedded professional development (EPD) capacity. Knight (2009) described the common tenets of coaches work in EPD structure as having a direct impact on classroom practices through the collaboration between teacher and coach with a focus on improvement. A coach's work in an EPD structure is to foster an intensive and ongoing one-on-one partnership with teachers. Important tenets to EPD is that it is job-embedded, grounded in partnership, and non-evaluative (Knight, 2019, pp. 18-19). I transitioned from the classroom to coach because I believed the more support I give teachers in the classroom the more students I can reach. I discovered over time that I loved doing research, looking at the data, and supporting teachers in a way that helped them be better

teachers. Teaching teachers through EPD is exciting, especially when the work we do is used to enhance student learning and relationships.

Coaching. I believe that teaching has become increasingly more complex over the years and teacher preparation and training have not been able to keep up with these complexities, therefore, coaches are necessary at the school level to help support teachers. The responsibility has been left to districts to train and apply new methods of support to the growing needs of our students. Coaches, when used correctly, can be a great support in this process. More specifically, teachers struggle with an increase in student mental health issues and express feelings of inadequacy in teaching students that are dealing with so many other things. At the same time, I witness many practices we use as teachers most likely and *unknowingly* re-traumatize students, inadvertently breaking down their trust and feelings of safety. When teachers are not given the support or the training it can lead to a teacher feeling ill-equipped and create toxic stress at the teacher level, which ultimately impacts students.

My school setting. Through my 20 + years of education, I have specifically worked in a rural middle school setting located in midwestern, Minnesota for the last eleven years. In these eleven years, ten have been in the role as an instructional coach. I have worked with teachers, supporting them on various classroom initiatives, and leading embedded professional development. Currently, our school setting has gone through significant shifts in our student population which has impacted how teachers are looking at educational decisions. Educators are seeing an increased number of behavior issues in students. Student behaviors may include struggling to self-regulate when frustrated, an

increase in exploding behaviors, more students fighting, suicide ideation, suicide attempts, completed suicides, and a lack of motivation, to name a few. Another noticeable shift is an increase of poverty, homelessness, bullying behaviors, and students caught with illegal substances in school. As we look at the challenges ahead, the need for more resources to hire trained mental health professionals is vital. Equally, we need to empower educators, through training and support, as they work daily with students in trauma.

Context and Importance

Rationale of this study

My interest in the topic of trauma and trauma-sensitive schools is both personal and professional. As educators look to the needs of students, many are overwhelmed and unsure about what they are supposed to do to best support students. Teachers got their training during different generations, therefore, there is a mix of teaching techniques and philosophies. This creates a challenge when applying knowledge of new research that shifts old ingrained beliefs and methods. Perceptions play a large role in how we respond and deal with student behavior and learning (Jennings, 2019). In this study, my goal is to understand and bridge some of the various perceptions, skills, and understandings of trauma research in order to apply in practice what we know to be true and right when incorporating trauma-sensitive practices. The challenge in developing a whole school approach is creating a culture when so many opposing views can be present around trauma-sensitive practices. The rationale in doing this study is to investigate how a culture starts to shift with new learning. On a larger scale, it can help us pinpoint what

areas of perceptions, understandings, and skills we need to bring more support or training. Furthermore, what understandings will help build towards a whole school trauma-sensitive ecosystem with the personnel currently serving in the schools?

When adults are able to make decisions that forge strong connections with students they have the ability to reduce the negative effects of trauma. By incorporating a predictable and safe environment, healthy strong adult relationships with their students, and activating the brain's calm state for academic learning (Cole et al., 2005) schools can reduce the harmful impact that trauma has on the individual student. Considering 50.6 million children attend public school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019), it is a natural environment to do this work. This study will help to identify where key areas of training are needed around trauma and trauma-sensitive practices to increase educators' self-efficacy. When there is a lack of understanding educators can make assumptions about students that lead to misdiagnosing or wrongly labeling a student (Sitler, 2008). On the flip side of this, using trauma-sensitive approaches can lead to success in identifying practices that create environments that teach and support a students' ability to learn, self-regulate, and manage relationships regardless of their trauma (Plumb, Bush, & Kerseвич, 2016; Sitler, 2008).

Vocabulary

1. **Trauma:** According to the Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health (2012), trauma is a physical or psychological injury, “resulting in damage to the mind and emotions resulting from a single event or series of experiences that overwhelm a person’s ability to cope or to integrate the memories and feelings associated with

the traumatic event(s)” (p. 1587). Further descriptions of trauma describe it as a response to a stressful experience in which a person’s ability to cope is reduced (Cole et al., 2005) or renders them *temporarily helpless* (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

2. **Trauma-Sensitive Schools or Trauma-Informed Schools:** National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) defined this as, “A trauma-informed school recognizes that trauma affects staff, students, families, communities, and systems. Thus organizational support, partnerships, and capacity-building are essential” (n.d., p. 1).
3. **Restorative Discipline** is a whole school relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment (CPS, n.d.).
4. **Secondary Trauma:** Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experiences of another (NCTSN, n.d.).

Potential Impact

The potential impact this qualitative study has is the ability to inform future embedded professional development as districts work towards building a comprehensive understanding of trauma and creating a trauma-sensitive environment. Gaining an awareness around school personnel’s existing perceptions, understandings, and skills helps to build a framework that potentially impacts policy decisions around discipline,

school absences, and services available to all students. Another impact is the awareness and attention given to classroom structure, procedures, curriculum decisions, and behavior. The ability to de-escalate behaviors helps students to stay in the classroom and not disrupt learning. On a larger scale, this case study can be replicated in order to find the specific needs of a school district when beginning the process of incorporating a whole school approach to trauma-sensitive practices.

Research Methods

A qualitative method of research was used to examine one district's existing perceptions, understandings, and skills around trauma and trauma-sensitive practices. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described qualitative research as, "descriptions, comparisons, correlational and experimental and single-subject approaches to gathering and analyzing data" (p. 343). In order to fully research existing perceptions, understandings, and skills, the use of several qualitative data collection methods will be beneficial. In order to really examine one districts' existing perceptions, understandings, and skills, the research focus will be on educators within their teaching environment. Therefore, I will be conducting a case study where multiple perspectives and methods can be used to gather data. This study will get an in-depth look at a district's whole-school trauma practices. Through surveys, field observations, focus groups, artifacts, and documents, I will gather data that will give an in-depth look to help guide future direction. My research question is: What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies

trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

Concluding Thoughts

Over the last several years I have expanded my understanding of trauma and the effect it has on a child's brain development. This understanding has helped me create specific strategies in my classroom that have increased student motivation and decreased behavior issues. Schools cannot change a student's environment or the hardships life throws at them but what we can do is be aware and be present so that they can have the space to heal the wounds childhood can inflict. Each child deserves not only our best effort but our intentional actions to be present, regulated and aware of their needs each day.

What is next?

To completely understand currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills of trauma and trauma-sensitive practices it is important to get an in-depth look at what the research says are best practices. In Chapter Two, I will be defining childhood trauma and its impact on the child from their health, social-emotional well-being, and their ability to perform academically. Chapter Two will also outline significant studies that have shown us how trauma affects the brain and nervous system and why schools are taking a serious look at the research. Next, I will research the impact trauma has on the child's ability to learn, behave, and form relationships. From there I will narrow the research to best practices in the educational setting around school culture, teachers, administrators, and specific trauma-sensitive practices. Lastly, the focus will be on the

best practices on policy for a trauma-sensitive whole school approach. This literature review will be used to inform research and the specific components of data collection required to add to the body of research.

CHAPTER TWO

Trauma

Introduction

Childhood trauma is a common and pervasive problem that affects two-thirds of children attending schools throughout the United States (Felitti et al., 1998; Plumb et al., 2016). This epidemic can lead to a lifetime of complicated problems in a child's life as they reach adulthood. Children are required by law to attend school which makes schools a significant part of a child's life. According to the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2019), it is estimated that 92% - 98% of children ranging from pre-k through 12th grade attend public schools. Students spend a significant amount of time in school communities, therefore, schools are a logical place to implement trauma-informed strategies that lead to eliminating the effects of trauma (Plumb, Bush, & Kerevich, 2016). In response to this point, schools need to build support within the school system that lays the foundation for students affected by trauma to productively learn and grow into healthy adults (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014.; Plumb et al., 2016). Creating healthy ecosystems that address the needs of the whole child can reduce the effects of childhood trauma (Plumb et al., 2016).

My research questions are: What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

In this chapter, I will be exploring how research has defined childhood trauma and the significant studies that led to this understanding. Additionally, I will investigate how trauma affects the developing child, socially and emotionally, as well as how the brain develops from a neurobiological perspective. Furthermore, I will investigate how trauma disrupts a child's ability to learn, self-regulate, and form positive relationships in school. More significantly, I will explore through research what it means to be trauma-informed, how to create systems that are trauma-sensitive, and how we lead learning organizations toward the effort of repairing trauma.

Childhood Trauma

According to the Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health (2012), trauma is a physical or psychological injury, “resulting in damage to the mind and emotions resulting from a single event or series of experiences that overwhelm a person’s ability to cope or to integrate the memories and feelings associated with the traumatic event(s)” (p. 1587). Further descriptions of trauma describe it as a response to a stressful experience in which a person’s ability to cope is reduced (Cole et al., 2005) or renders them *temporarily helpless* (Forbes, 2012; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Trauma, according to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), can happen in any family, even if they have adults that work to keep their children safe. For example, children are exposed to trauma with the death of a loved one, a natural disaster, a car accident, or if they experience community violence. Furthermore, the impact of trauma reaches all races and socioeconomic backgrounds (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACE)

One significant study conducted on trauma was the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACEs) done in 1998. This study revealed mounting evidence that trauma during childhood disrupts development and leads to lifelong medical and psychological issues into adulthood (Dye, 2018). ACEs was a longitudinal study conducted by Felitti et al. (1998) through the collaborative efforts of the Center of Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente. The study measured adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and adult health, psychological health, and professional outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998; Plumb et al., 2016). The original study looked at seven categories of adverse childhood experiences, however, further follow-up studies have added three more categories to ACEs. The original seven categories used in defining trauma were; psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, substance use in the household, abuse on the mother, mental illness in the house, and criminal behavior (Felitti et al., 1998). The significance of this study was the large number of participants and its time span of a ten year period. Seventeen thousand people participated and the participants were defined as being well educated, having good incomes, and receiving appropriate health care (Felitti et al., 1998). The study revealed that there was a direct correlation to the number of ACEs to negative physical health, mental health, and workforce outcomes, which confirmed that childhood trauma does have devastating effects over time (Plumb et al., 2016). Further ACE studies incorporated three more factors within their study, which included parental divorce, emotional neglect, and physical neglect.

The study revealed that adverse childhood experiences were much more common than previously thought and caused problems later in life on all aspects of a person's well being. Craig (2017) believed the study revealed, “... substantial evidence that chronic stress at an early age overtaxes the body’s biological systems and alters a host of stress-related responses in ways that are detrimental to development” (p. 17). This was further explained through the advancements in Neurobiology and studies done on the brain and nervous system.

Categories of Trauma

Childhood traumatic events are grouped into categories that help to identify the type of trauma that occurred. These categories are, acute, chronic, and complex trauma. Van der Kolk (2009) also defined a fourth category under toxic stress called developmental childhood trauma.

Acute trauma is defined as a single event, such as a natural disaster or a parent’s suicide. In contrast, repeated trauma overtime is defined as chronic or complex trauma. Chronic and complex trauma is defined as repeated exposure to assaults on the mind and body (Plumb, Bush, & Kerevich, 2016). However, what sets complex trauma apart from chronic trauma is exposure to trauma by primary caregivers (Plumb et al., 2016). The term “complex trauma” was first explored through the National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s Complex Trauma Task Force in 2003, and it emerged from the recognition that many people experienced multiple adversities in their lifetime (Souers, 2016). According to Cook, Blaustein, Spinazzola, and Van der Kolk (2003), complex trauma is

...exposure that refers to the simultaneous or sequential occurrences of child maltreatment—including emotional abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing domestic violence...Complex trauma outcomes refer to the range of clinical symptomatology that appears after such exposures. (p. 5)

When a child is exposed to more than one traumatic event or repeated exposure it can cause a level of toxic stress that affects their daily lives even long after the event is over (NCTSN, 2018). For example, when a child is exposed to physical, psychological or sexual abuse.

Neurobiology and the Developing Brain

Studies on the brain have added to our understanding of how trauma impacts the child's social and emotional health as well as their ability to learn. These studies have revealed that childhood trauma can alter the brain structure rendering a child unable to regulate stress, maintain positive relationships with peers, and learn. Childhood trauma has a negative impact on a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development (McConnico, Boynton-Jarrett, Bailey, & Nandi, 2016; Perry, 2006; Walkley & Cox, 2013). According to Perry, Pollard, Blakley, and Vigilante (1995), "The brain develops in a sequential and hierarchical fashion - i.e., from less complex (brainstem) to most complex (limbic, cortical areas)" (p. 276). During childhood, the brain develops and provides an organizing framework for the child. During this time, the brain is the most vulnerable since it is the most receptive to environmental input, which is defined as neuroplasticity (Perry et al., 1995). What these studies revealed is that during these

critical development stages, childhood trauma can disrupt the brain's development (Cole et al., 2005, p. 23; Perry et al., 1995).

The brain is responsible for mediating, or bringing about, all emotional, cognitive, behavioral, social, and physiological functioning (Perry, Pollard, Blakley, Baker, & Vigilante, 1995). The overarching function of the brain is to survive, therefore, it is composed of neurons organized into systems designed to sense, process, store, perceive, and act on information from our internal and external world (Perry et al., 1994). Studies have revealed, that the parts of the brain that get used the most gets developed the most. Perry et al. (1994) calls this "use dependent". Trauma develops the parts of the brain that are responsible for survival which in turn impacts how a person senses, processes, stores, perceives and acts on their experiences. When in continual survival mode toxic stress is developed which has a negative effect on the central nervous system, comprised of the brain and spinal cord (Plumb, Bush, & Kersevich, 2016).

Normal stress. Studies have revealed that stress is a natural part of life and is not considered a negative thing. When stress is experienced, people have the capacity to be resilient, bounce back quickly and recover from the stress they have experienced. This only happens when the stress is predictable, moderate, and controlled (Plumb et al., 2016). Stress can be defined using a continuum, on one end of the continuum there is developmentally appropriate stress and on the opposite end of the continuum there is traumatic stress or toxic stress (Walkley & Cox, 2013). With developmentally appropriate stress, children are able to build resiliency skills and good coping strategies with supportive adults (Perry, 2005; Plumb et al., 2016; Walkley & Cox, 2016).

Toxic stress. Toxic stress, on the other hand, is considered unpredictable and can elicit feelings of horror and helplessness (Walkley & Cox, 2016). Prolonged stress can be toxic to the human body and developing brain, due to the brain's malleable state, or neuroplasticity. Toxic stress, developed from complex trauma, changes the developing brains' chemistry and re-structures systems at the neurobiological level (Craig 2016; Jennings, 2019; Perry et al., 1994; Van der Kolk, 2003), and at a young age, it can tax the bodies biological systems and alter the stress-related responses that are detrimental to development (Craig, 2017). Since the brain is responsible for driving behavior, a student who experienced toxic stress at a young age can become hyper-vigilant due to trauma. When they continue to be hyper-vigilant they are in the part of the brain that is designed for survival. Souers & Hall (2016) stated that "The limbic system controls arousal, emotions, and the flight, fight and freeze responses" (p. 31). Siegel (as cited in Souers & Hall, 2016) called this the "downstairs brain" (p. 31). According to Plumb et al. (2016), "These neurobiological changes can, in turn, influence a number of critical cognitive and emotional processes ... when disturbed ... may represent ... risk factors for trauma-related psychopathology ... " (p. 114) (See Figure 1).

The prefrontal cortex is the higher functioning part of the brain and enables students to think, reason, and maintain flexibility (Souers & Hall, 2016) (See Figure 1). The primary function of the prefrontal cortex is to regulate the limbic system so it only goes into survival mode when absolutely necessary (Souers & Hall, 2016). Siegel (as cited in Souers & Hall, 2016) calls this our "upstairs brain" (p. 31). Many researchers (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016) explained that healthy

brain development is when the prefrontal cortex has control over the limbic system.

When stress is present a healthy brain will go into survival mode and when the danger is no longer present the prefrontal cortex goes back online and brings the body into a regulated state. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the student who is hyper-vigilant to the perceived danger around every corner.

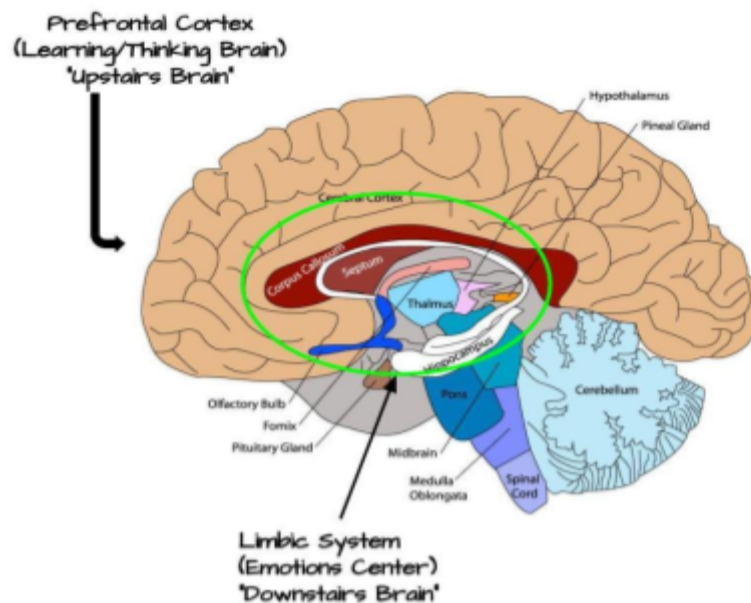


Figure 1. Diagram of the Human Brain:Upstairs & Downstairs Brain.

Trauma disrupts healthy brain development, rendering children unable to activate their prefrontal cortex to regulate stress. Over time the survival part of the brain becomes more dominant, contributing to the student's difficulties in school. Children who experience trauma and toxic stress, particularly family violence, see the world differently than their peers that have not experienced trauma (Cole et al., 2005, p. 17). Trauma that leads to toxic stress renders the child unable to decipher the difference between a safe place and a dangerous place. According to Cole et al. (2005),

When the perpetrator of violence is a caregiver ..., the impact on a child's self-perception and worldview can get carried into the classroom, where it can interfere with the ability to process information and maintain control over behaviors and emotions. (pp. 2-3)

The student will struggle with learning, regulating emotions, trusting others, and overall success in a school environment. When children perceive danger their brains release the *stress response* that activates an instinct to *fight, flight, or freeze* (Cole et al., 2005, p. 17; Perry, 2014; Souers & Hall, 2016). The state of stress is in the limbic area of the brain, which is designed for survival (Souers & Hall, 2016). In this mode, the brain is delivering a message that the body must respond to, the only message is to escape danger and once things feel safe it is designed to return quickly to a regulated state (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Window of tolerance. According to the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM) (2018), the window of tolerance is the place where things feel well and a place where students are able to cope with any situation that arises; maintaining the ability to stay calm, focused, and alert. When students are not within their window of tolerance they enter into a hyper or hypo aroused state. This state can cause students to struggle with learning, relationships, and the ability to regulate emotions in everyday situations (NICABM, 2018). Unfortunately, traumatized children are chronically living in stress therefore, their window of tolerance gets smaller and they rarely return to a regulated state (See Figure 2). This disrupts the development

of the brain and affects learning, mood, relationships, and executive functioning skills (Craig, 2017; Souers, 2016).

Hyperarousal. When a child lives and experiences toxic stress they enter a hyperarousal state (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Souers, 2016). In a hyper-aroused state, humans release a chemical into the body (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). This chemical in large doses is toxic and can create impairment in development to their *learning, memory, mood, relational skills, and executive functioning* which are all needed

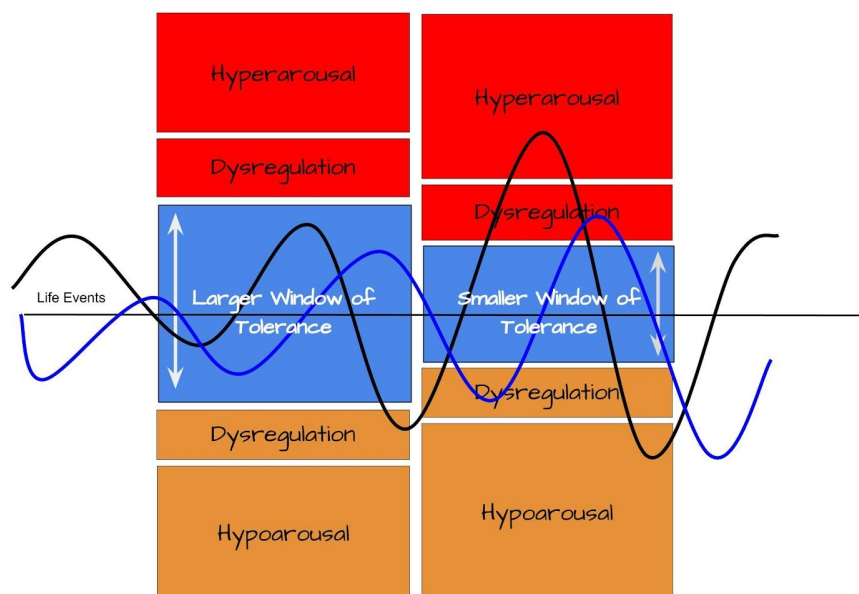


Figure 2. Window of Tolerance. Healthy Window of Tolerance & Unhealthy Window of Tolerance
Modified from NICABM, 2019

for success in school (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 22). In a hyper-aroused state, the response is to fight or flee, students will feel agitated, angry, anxious, and even out of control. Unfortunately, this state of hyperarousal can become so normal to some that it is a regular mode of functioning (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2016; NICABM, 2019).

Impact on the school environment

Trauma has an effect on a student's academic success, behavior, and social and emotional interactions (Cole et al., 2005, p. 6). According to Streek-Fisher and Van der Kolk (2000) (as cited in McInerney & McKlindon, 2014),

Children who have experienced trauma may find it more challenging than their peers to pay attention and process new information, and evidence suggests that some of these children develop sensory processing difficulties which can contribute to problems with writing and reading. (p. 4)

Children who are exposed to repeated violence and instability at home experience the world as a threatening place and continue to be hypervigilant of perceived dangers as they go between home and school. As they are avoiding danger and pain, they are unable to receive positive messages, perform academically, and behave appropriately (Cole et al., 2005). Furthermore, students will develop coping strategies to deal with the dangers they face. These coping strategies are important in a dangerous situation, however, they can become barriers when no longer needed. These coping strategies not only affect a child's social and emotional ability but highly impede their academic and behavioral success in school and classroom settings. Students are unable to engage in the learning tasks required of them (Cole et al., 2005). Additionally, their hyper-aroused state affects their reactions and behavior to the people and circumstances around them, which in turn makes them unsuccessful in a school setting.

Learning. Schools have high expectations for learning, however, when students are in a hyper-aroused state due to early trauma, students are not able to access the

learning needed to meet these high expectations (Cole et al., 2005). With a lack of support, students in trauma are being left behind their peers, creating a gap in learning. Students who have experienced trauma have multiple barriers to learning in a school environment (Craig, 2017; Perry, 2006; Souers & Hall, 2016). Many academic tasks require students to be able to pay attention, organize, comprehend, memorize, and produce work, however, trauma undermines the ability to accomplish these learning tasks (Cole et al., 2005). Trauma compromises the ability to organize, remember, grasp cause and effect relationships, and interferes with creativity (Cole et al., 2005). Craig (2017) explained the effect on students stating that, "... thinking is held 'hostage' by relentless fear and hyperarousal that derail focus needed to achieve academically" (p. 7). Frustrated students with trauma histories often disengage from school leading to higher dropout rates. Another barrier to a student in trauma is their ability to regulate stress and be resilient which may cause students to act out and or give up completely.

Behavior. Many of the behavior problems that stem from trauma are the inability to read social cues, overreacting to teachers and students, failing to connect cause and effect, and other forms of miscommunication (Cole et al., 2005). Through a trauma lens, a child's view of the world and self can interfere with their ability to process information and maintain control over behaviors and emotions (Cole et al., 2005) or anticipate consequences to their actions (Craig, 2017). A further ACE study done with elementary students found that students with an ACE score of three or higher were six times more likely to have behavior problems (Sciaraffa, Zeanah, & Zeanah, 2017, p. 344). The behavior issues were categorized as: struggling with self-regulation, lack of impulse

control, oppositional or volatile, extreme reactions, defensive or aggressive, self-harm, substance abuse, runaway, and prostitution (Sciaraffa et al., 2017). Additionally, traumatized children can have difficulty in forming attachments due to being unable to trust others, empathize, modulate emotions, and manage stress (Cole et al., 2005; Jennings, 2019; Plumb et al., 2016).

Creating ecosystems that are trauma-sensitive are essential in mitigating the effects of childhood trauma. Through training, schools can create a safe environment for all students that work with the brain's adaptive capacity or neuroplasticity, helping students recover their capacity for self-regulation, social connection, and learning (Craig, 2017). In order to do this, Craig (2017) stated the importance to incorporate "... instruction ... that promotes neural development, consistent use of positive behavioral support, collaboration with community mental [health] professionals, and creation of a school climate that ensures safety for all youth" (p. 15). Creating predictable classroom routines, lessons that are predictable and clearly communicated, and safe environments that children feel safe and secure help all students, however, this is essential for students that have trauma (Cole et al., 2005).

Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Education systems are built to support students' academic achievement, however, students cannot learn if they do not feel safe and their needs are not being met (NCTSN, n.d.; Craig, 2017, Souers, 2016). Trauma creates many barriers and challenges for students with regard to school performance. Therefore, according to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) (n.d.), "A trauma-informed school recognizes that

trauma affects staff, students, families, communities, and systems. Thus organizational support, partnerships, and capacity-building are essential” (para. 2). A whole-system approach ensures the students’ needs are being met in order to mitigate the effects of trauma so that students can learn.

Many advances have been made in understanding the benefits of incorporating trauma-sensitive school environments at the state level and individual school levels.

Cole, Eisner, Gregory, and Ristuccia (2013) defined a trauma-sensitive school as a place where:

... all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma’s impact on learning on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission. An ongoing, inquiry-based process allows for the necessary teamwork, coordination, creativity, and sharing of responsibility for all students. (p. 11)

Cole et al. (2013) believed from years of working with multiple schools, that trauma-sensitive schools contain six core attributes. These core attributes make up the larger vision in which all adults share an understanding of trauma, support all students to feel safe, address students’ needs in holistic ways, explicitly connects students to the school community, embrace teamwork, and anticipate and adapt (Cole et al., 2013, pp. 11-12; McNerney & McKlindon, 2014; Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016).

Sharing an understanding, according to the NCTSN (n.d.) is when we, “... start with the knowledge that all administrators, teachers, and staff can help reduce the effects of trauma on children” (para. 1). Through awareness, trauma-sensitive schools train and equip school personnel to gain the tools to recognize when students need support and

how to provide that support. When all adults recognize trauma responses and can accommodate and respond within the classroom the students will feel safe and cared for. Furthermore, when schools recognize trauma they are more likely to refer children to outside professionals when necessary so students can get the help they need (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016; Perry, 2006).

Another important aspect of creating a trauma-sensitive environment is to have an understanding of how trauma impacts relationships and behavior in order to build student agency and resiliency (Cole et al., 2005). It is important to create a shift in how teachers, administrators, and school staff approach discipline (Craig, 2017; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Creating a trauma-sensitive school environment requires adults to approach the behavior of students with curiosity (Craig, 2017; Sitler, 2008). Sitler (2008) believed that a "... teacher who no longer perceives the student negatively can consider physical and emotional needs that are not being met" (p. 120). In order to do this, Craig (2017) believed teachers need to replace harsh judgment on the behavior and start becoming curious about why the behavior is happening (pp. 8-9). Craig (2017) said the goal in approaching discipline with curiosity helps the caregiver replace previous insufficient judgment, and create protection and support that foster an environment that supports students. This would achieve creating positive neurobiological pathways and give them choices when dealing with stress. The hope is that by creating new pathways in the brain, students can correlate a negative relationship to trauma (p. 9). Furthermore,

approaching behavior that addresses the dysregulation that limits their ability to achieve academically with a supportive caregiver increases students' awareness (Craig, 2017).

Systematic Approach

Supportive school environments can play an important role in addressing the needs of children that have experienced trauma (Cavanaugh, 2016; Cole et al., 2013, p. 8). The NCTSN (n.d) states that a trauma-informed whole school approach should have ten essential elements present: identifying and assessing traumatic stress, addressing and treating traumatic stress, teaching trauma education and awareness, having partnerships with students and families, creating a trauma-informed learning environment (social/emotional skills and wellness), being culturally responsive, integrating emergency management & crisis response, understanding and addressing staff self-care to respond to secondary traumatic stress, evaluating and revising school discipline policies and practices, collaborating across systems and establishing community partnerships.

Cole et al. (2013) identified a vision for creating a systematic approach to trauma. In a trauma-sensitive school, adults share an understanding, support all students to feel safe, address students in a holistic way, explicitly connects students to the school community, embrace teamwork, and anticipate and adapt (p. 12). Trauma has an impact on the school system, therefore looking at a systematic approach to addressing trauma and creating environments that are predictable and safe benefits the students that have experienced trauma. The greater impact is the culture of the school seen through increased behavior through better regulation and coping strategies which leads to increased learning.

Academic Instruction for Traumatized Children

Examining overall teaching approaches in a trauma-sensitive environment is an important aspect that goes beyond teaching social-emotional skills (Cole et al., 2005). Although academic learning is a top priority of the school environment, research has informed us that academic learning does not take place until students are functioning in their prefrontal cortex (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016). Therefore, schools need to address the needs of students living with trauma. Craig (2017) defined trauma-sensitive schools as a system where staff create safe zones that foster the skills students need to be successful learners (p. 5). Trauma-sensitive schools also provide support for students to thrive in the classroom environment (Plum et al., 2016, p. 38). Another essential factor to keep in mind is that the instructional practices that are essential for students in trauma are also effective for all students (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016).

Through the combined research of Cole et al. (2015), Craig (2017), Souers and Hall (2016), and Sporleder and Forbes (2016) essential concepts to their combined work began to emerge. I combined the research to form essential themes that emerged and defined seven pillars that schools can incorporate into a trauma-informed whole school culture and environment; Awareness, Positive Classroom Culture, Intentional Instruction, Restorative Discipline, Linking with Mental Health Professionals, Self-Care, and Professional Development. These seven pillars are essential in the school and classroom culture and environment for students in trauma to acquire the learning required. Furthermore, it creates a bridge between the gap in academic performance that

exists in education between students dealing with trauma and students that are not dealing with trauma.

Awareness

Shared understanding. To incorporate an effective trauma-sensitive culture the most important aspect is to have a shared understanding of the impact of trauma on students (Cole et al., 2013; Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016). Educators that have an awareness of research on trauma are more likely to shift classroom practices in response to their understanding. Souers and Hall (2016) described shared understandings as “...fundamental truths” (p. 10). These truths are, first and foremost, the understanding that trauma is real and it is prevalent. Another fundamental truth is that trauma is toxic to the brain and affects development and learning on students in which schools need to be prepared to support students in trauma, even if they are not aware of what that trauma is specifically. The last fundamental truth that educators require is the knowledge that children are resilient and can grow, learn, and succeed within positive learning environments (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Self-aware. The teachers’ role, according to Cole et al. (2005), in a trauma-sensitive environment, is not turning the teacher into a therapist for students. However, the need is to “enable them to create stable, supportive classrooms in which traumatized children can become full participants in the school community” (p. 52). It is vital for educators to do their own work of bringing self-awareness to their own behaviors, triggers, and decisions that affect the classroom. Souers and Hall (2016) believed that, “The overall goal for us is to act with integrity, to be consistent and

reliable, to remain logical and regulated in times of stress, and - when facing disruptive, defiant, and disrespectful behaviors - to stay in our ‘upstairs brain’” (p. 36). Through self-awareness, educators should be able to identify their own triggers, know how to self-regulate their emotions when stressed, understand their baseline energy level, and adjust for the needs of the students in front of them (Craig, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2016). Educators are role models for students in managing stress and dealing with conflict in inappropriate ways. Students with trauma backgrounds are acutely watching and an educator’s actions and reactions will affect their relationships with students (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016).

Students awareness. Addressing students in a holistic way is helping to bring awareness to their own behavior and body responses to situations that arise. When students are in survival mode they are responding to the messages delivered to them by their brains that the body must respond to. Many times this response will be disruptive and inappropriate yet very normal for them (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 31). Creating awareness for the student to their body responses and reactions strengthen their ability to make another choice when it arises again. Awareness is what helps students identify feelings, bring awareness to the mode their brain is functioning in (survival mode), and then regulate themselves to make better choices (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Social-emotional learning. Trauma can have lasting effects on a student’s ability to form appropriate social and emotional skills needed while at school which impacts the relationships with teachers and peers alike (Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016). Incorporating social and emotional learning into classroom practices helps foster a

positive common language within the classroom environment while teaching students the social and emotional skills to respond appropriately. Sitler (2009) stated that “The task is to teach with a pedagogy of awareness that provides ongoing support for the needs of all learners” (p. 120).

Positive Classroom Culture

Setting a positive classroom culture requires educators to be intentional. Craig (2017) explained that teachers, “... have an intentional mindset that informs all aspects of the classroom environment; the emotional tone, the choice of materials, and the sequence of activities that are introduced” (p. 103). In a trauma-sensitive environment creating a safe and secure environment for students is the adults’ responsibility. A safe and secure environment includes the relationships formed between teacher and student, acceptable peer interactions, and overall tone and mood of the environment.

Relationships. In a trauma-sensitive school infrastructure, there is time for building positive relationships to develop between students and caring adults (Cole et al., 2005; Dods, 2013). These meaningful relationships can create a surrogate for students to build new pathways that counteract the devastating effects of trauma on children. Cole et al. (2005) pointed out that “Positive role models and ways of dealing with peers can play a major role in the healing process and lead to strong academic, social, and behavioral outcomes” (p. 38). In a white paper published by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Complex Trauma Task Force (2003) proposed a model to address the three factors as essential in healing the effects of trauma called ARC. 1. Building secure Attachments between child and caregiver(s) 2. Enhancing self-Regulatory capacities; and

3. Increasing Competencies across multiple domains. Attachments for children, enhancing self-regulation, and increasing competencies (ARC) has been successful in addressing trauma in schools (Dorado, Martinez, Mearthur, & Leibovitz, 2016; NCTSN, 2003).

Relationships, above all else, drive the success of all the seven pillars of instructional practices. When educators form a solid relationship with students, they are able to impact the success of their students in the learning environment (Craig, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2016; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016)). Craig (2017) stated that “Teens learn best in environments characterized by safe, caring relationships; meaningful collaboration; and frequent opportunities to engage in activities that integrate concepts and ideas across disciplines” (p. 11). However, it is realistic to say that educators will not build a strong bond with each of their students every year. It is human nature to be drawn to certain characteristics of the people around us. For educators, this is no different. Educators are drawn to certain characteristics of the students yet they need to be a positive adult for all students they serve. Souers and Hall (2016) explained that relationships for all students need to be “Safe Enough, Healthy Enough” (p. 96). Souers and Hall (2016) defined this type of relationship realistic and what the students need,

If we provide consistency, positivity, and integrity in all our interactions with our students, we’ll establish a relationship that is *safe enough* for them. And if we initiate a repair whenever necessary, earnestly working to model and engage in appropriate interpersonal behaviors, we can cultivate an environment that is *healthy enough* for them. If they know we will be relentless in our support of

their endeavors, forgive them for their errors they make along the way, and maintain our determination that they will live up to their potential and our expectation, then the relationship will follow. (p. 96)

Predictable routines. Another step in creating a positive classroom culture is creating predictable routines. Creating routines that are predictable creates safety for students that have experienced trauma (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017; Nealy-Oparah & Scruggs-Hussein, 2018). Students that have experienced trauma and toxic stress live in a state of hypervigilance. When they are in an environment that is unpredictable they cannot come out of their “downstairs brain”. Their window of tolerance is much smaller than a student with no trauma and can be set off quicker by disruptive routines or expectations (Souers & Hall, 2016). When these students are in a predictable environment they are able to focus on learning and not on what might or might not happen in the environment.

Intentional Instruction

Traumatized children can be hard to identify in the classroom because they can exhibit learning struggles similar to learning-disabled students and also have significant behavior problems (Cole et al., 2005). Many times they benefit from some of the same learning interventions, such as literacy instruction, classroom accommodations, and specialized instruction. Creating a learning-rich environment for a student requires specific teaching approaches. Cole et al. (2005) outlined three different approaches that help traumatized students learn better. These consist of some overarching teaching approaches, language-based approaches, and ensuring appropriate evaluations.

Supporting classroom instruction fosters learning for traumatized students to learn and grow and feel success in what is required of them.

Restorative practices

Restore, restore, and restore some more. Souers and Hall (2016) explained that “What students show us is really all they know. It’s up to us - the adults in their lives - to offer an array of appropriate, alternative means for them to regulate their emotions and manage the intensity of their behaviors” (p. 34). Creating a restorative discipline practice does not mean students are not held accountable for their behavior, what it means is that we do the work of building students’ skills to choose alternative methods of responding to their circumstances.

Restorative practices over punitive measures. Restorative practices defined by the Chicago Public Schools Office of Social & Emotional Learning in partnership with the Embrace Restorative Justice in Schools Collaborative (n.d.) defined restorative practices as, “... ways of proactively developing relationships and community, as well as repairing community when harm is done” (p. 2). Craig (2017) stated that “Restorative justice approaches shift away from punishment and retribution, particularly for young offenders and for less serious offenses, and toward creating the conditions that allow for restoring relationships and making things right” (p. 50). The purpose or shift towards a restorative practice is to focus on “crime” as a violation against a person versus our current punitive practices where “crime” is against a law or a rule (Rich, Mader, & Pacheco, 2017, p. 4). The root tenets of restorative practices stem from the focus being on the well-being of the community. In doing so, the focus is on repairing the community

when a violation has occurred and taking responsibility for the wrongdoing (Craig, 2017). True justice is awareness that the violation has caused harm, therefore, focusing on teaching students skills to repairing the harm and the relationships that were affected while maintaining communication, emotional connection, and meaningful relationships (Rich et al., 2017).

The most used disciplinary practices in schools are centered around punitive practices. Through punitive practices, misbehavior is defined as breaking a school rule or disobeying authority. Once this occurs, an authority figure establishes what rule is broken and who is to blame. The next step is to give a punishment that fits the “crime” with the focus of leveraging what is important to the perpetrator or even more we remove them from the community. The goal is to increase pain and unpleasantness to deter or prevent reoccurrence. Unfortunately, research shows us that the behaviors stop in the moment but often return once the punishment is over. A restorative approach changes perspective and defines the misbehavior as harm done to one person or group by another. This shift in thinking creates a process of restoring the relationships (Rich et al., 2017). Everyone works to problem solve, build back the relationship, and achieve a mutually-desired outcome. Greene (2014) shifts the thinking around behavior using a new lens stating, “Challenging behavior occurs when the demands and expectations are placed upon a child outstrip the skills he has to respond adaptively (p. 27). Greene defines this as Lagging skills and unsolved problems as the catalyst to challenging behavior (Greene, 2014, pp. 27-28). The accountability is in the understanding of the impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, and working towards repairing harm. The goal is to

create meaningful restitution to reconcile and acknowledge responsibility for choices. In the long term, students learn critical social and emotional skills that serve them in life (Rich et al., 2017).

Proactive versus reactive. Souers and Hall (2016) acknowledged that one of the contributing factors for teachers leaving the profession has been due to student behavior issues and yet teachers are not given the tools needed to deal with this in their teacher training (p. 116). However, many discipline issues and the labeling of students come from the need to control or understand why a behavior is happening. This need for control leads to focusing on reactive consequences and discipline and not proactive ways of changing the discourse and keeping kids in school and helping them thrive. According to Souers and Hall (2016), “This perspective is adult-centered and deficit-focused rather than student-centered and strengths-focused” (p. 114). The need for control by teacher and student at times lead to power struggles which can escalate into reactive discipline. Stepping back and evaluating situations from another's perspective can eliminate reactive discipline (Souers & Hall, 2016)

The strength behind the restorative practice is based in the community. The center of school communities are the relationships within the community, therefore in order to establish restorative practices, the community must intentionally build, strengthen, and restore relationships. It is difficult to “restore” a community that was not established in the first place. Therefore, within restorative practices, all members are building relationships and community. Furthermore, social and emotional learning becomes essential; teaching self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible

decision making. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) (n.d.) stated that “Restorative Practices create a safe and productive learning spaces where students develop social and emotional skills and strong relationships with peers and adults” (p. 10).

Restorative classroom. CPS (n.d.) defined, “The overarching goal of the restorative classroom - meeting the needs for respect, acceptance, and significance for all members ...” (p. 28). Outlined in the toolkit created by CPS (n.d.), research shows that all classroom communities have three basic social needs, “to feel respected, to feel accepted, and to feel significant” (p. 28). The role of the teacher is to institute classroom rituals and activities that focus on students feeling noticed, valued and cared about by the group (CPS, n.d., p. 28). The educator’s role in restorative practices according to CPS is to create supportive school communities that allow students to thrive and learn. Furthermore, social and emotional learning (SEL) is at the center of the school community in and out of the classroom. This learning is focused on self-awareness, empathy, communication skills, and responsible decision making, relationship building, and conflict resolution (CPS, n.d.). Another essential component is increasing safety by decreasing and or de-escalating conflict and volatile situations and decreasing exclusionary practices such as suspensions and expulsion. Within restorative practices, educators increase the safety and productivity of the learning environment by placing importance of community as well as strengthening relationships among students and between students and staff (CPS, n.d., p. 10).

Mental Health

In a trauma-sensitive environment, teachers have access to support systems that provide direct clinical support for individual students. In the boundaries that must be maintained, teachers and mental health clinicians can consult on difficult cases. Furthermore, teachers can get training and insight on how to best support and help the child in order to reduce trauma as a barrier to learning (Cole et al., 2005). Another important aspect of a system of support is having mental health clinicians be a resource for families and students that teachers can refer to.

Misdiagnosed. When a child is anxious, lacks focus, and has language-processing difficulty they are usually referred for testing in attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder or ADHD (Cole et al., 2005). When a child is misdiagnosed, it can lead to years of continued academic and behavior problems. Traumatized children can struggle with critical brain functions that mimic attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), such as focusing, learning, self-regulation, and decision-making (Plumb et al., 2016; Walkley & Cox, 2013). Trauma has similar symptoms as ADHD, however, it is often overlooked as being the culprit to the symptoms the students are exhibiting. Partnering with mental health professionals can be a resource for educators in order to develop effective strategies for their students using the correct diagnosis and interventions.

Self-Care

Secondary stress. Secondary stress is a very real and persistent condition among educators. According to the NCTSN (2008), “any educator who works directly with traumatized children and adolescents is vulnerable to the effects of trauma—referred to as

compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress— being physically, mentally, or emotionally worn out, or feeling overwhelmed by students’ traumas” (p. 1). Compassion fatigue is a point when professionals feel that they are not able to make an impact on students no matter what they do. Perry (2014) explains that when adults work in a resource-limited situation with children that show a host of problems adults can start “... feeling helpless when trying to heal these children – all can make the adults working with these children vulnerable to develop their own emotional or behavioral problems” (p. 2). This leads to hopelessness and can make a teacher question their beliefs about the meaning of life (Craig, 2017, p. 101).

Educators may not experience the trauma firsthand but the indirect exposure to children experiencing trauma can lead to profound emotional and physical consequences (Craig, 2017). Due to a mismatch of skills and organizational expectations, teachers frequently struggle when students have challenging or out of control behaviors. In this situation, an educator can expend a large amount of effort that does not yield expected results. Craig (2017) stated, “It is likely, therefore, that teacher stress is exacerbated by the fact that the unwanted conduct cannot be brought under control by traditional interventions such as consequences, punishment, or contingency reinforcement” (p. 100).

Another contributing factor to secondary stress is that educators find it difficult to maintain a level of emotional detachment needed for managing student behaviors which can trigger a sense of hopelessness (Craig, 2017, pp.100-101). Educators get very little training in recognizing symptoms of primary trauma and virtually no training in self-care routines that aid in the prevention of secondary trauma compared to other professions that

deal with trauma (Craig, 2017). Many educators, as caregivers, are attuned to their students' needs for self-care, many times advising them and supporting them in their effort to take care of themselves. However, many educators will postpone their own goals, struggling to find a way to actually implement self-care into their own lives (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 192). The problem is that teacher stress has a negative impact on students, especially those in need of adult support which results in behaviors that lead to off-task behavior and disruptions leading to more teacher stress. This is what Jennings (2019) identified as “burnout cascade” (p. 39). Through surveying the literature on teacher burnout, Jennings (2019), along with her colleague Greenberg, identified three stages of burnout. The first of the three stages was *emotional exhaustion* due to the taxing nature of teaching (Jennings, 2019). The second stage is *depersonalization*.

Depersonalization is defined when teachers develop a cynical attitude towards students and see them as the problem and not the people who are suffering (Jennings, 2019). The final stage is when teachers feel they can no longer do their job defined through *a lack of sense of efficacy* (Jennings, 2019). According to Menschner and Maul (2016), “Secondary traumatic stress can lead to chronic fatigue, disturbing thoughts, poor concentration, emotional detachment and exhaustion, avoidance, absenteeism, and physical illness” (p. 5). The key to good self-care is first, be able to identify the need and secondly, what to do about it once it is identified.

Prevention and intervention. Preventing secondary traumatic stress increases staff performance, morale, and reduces teacher burnout and staff turnover (Menschner & Maul, 2016). Preventing secondary stress or compassion fatigue in educators starts with

educators recognizing it is essential for them to engage in self-care so that we can provide for students' needs. This takes self-awareness to their own stress and what to do about it (Jennings, 2019; Teater & Ludgate, 2014). Some strategies that reduce secondary traumatic stress include: training to raise awareness of secondary traumatic stress, offering opportunities for staff to reflect on their own trauma histories, coaching opportunities centered around reflection on student and family interactions, incentivising physical activity, yoga, and meditation, and giving permission for mental health days (Menschner & Maul, 2016, p. 5).

Professional Development

Creating a whole-school trauma-sensitive approach to education is vital for students that have experienced trauma (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017; Jennings, 2019; Souers & Hall, 2016). Within this process, staff training is essential to incorporating trauma-sensitive approaches into the daily workings of school culture. It is important that all the adults share an understanding of trauma, continue to work on being aware of their own triggers to maintain a self-regulated state in the school culture, and be able to bring awareness to students of their own assumptions and behavior. By doing this, teachers will forge positive alternatives for negative behaviors, create a safe classroom culture, increase instructional choices that meet traumatized student's needs and increase outside resources to support students in trauma (Craig, 2017).

The principal's leadership is vital in providing and engaging staff through the strategic planning and integration of trauma-sensitive routines into the existing school structures (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017). The staff will have differing levels of expertise

and the administrator begins the process to assess the levels of needs and focus the training around staff needs (Cole et al., 2005, p. 50). However, if the structure is not present within the school community, it is important to create a structure to accomplish the goal. Looking at the infrastructure and culture of the building is necessary in establishing a trauma-sensitive approach school-wide. Therefore, creating an evaluation process that guides administrators in the identification process, acknowledge, and address barriers from all levels such as, discipline practices, class routines, professional development, and policy. This process of identification will help in identifying and targeting staff needs around training and support (Cole et al., 2005).

When transitioning to a whole school systematic approach, it is important to provide ongoing embedded professional development (Craig, 2017). Cole et al. 2013 defined the need for PD in a trauma-sensitive school culture for, "... educators, administrators, and allied professionals should provide opportunities to develop a shared understanding of trauma's impact on learning and build skills in using a whole-school, inquiry-based approach to creating trauma-sensitive schools" (p. 14). Embedded professional development can be addressed through small group discussion, book clubs, observations, one on one coaching sessions, and alongside other teaching practices (Craig, 2017, p. 102).

In order to establish a culture for students in trauma to thrive in a learning culture, teachers need training and support to acquire skills needed to get all students learning. This means that they need to be able to address trauma responses and help students forge new ways of responding to stressors. According to Cole et al. (2005), a flexible

framework around staff training should cover three core areas. The first area is focused on strengthening relationships between adults and students while conveying the vital role that staff have with students and their families' lives. The second core area is to identify and use outside support. Thirdly, training around helping traumatized children modulate their emotions and gain social and academic competence (p. 50). Professional development is a core component of trauma-sensitive whole-school approaches to working with students that have experienced trauma. With a focus on changing the school environment, it is equally important to create policy to fit trauma-sensitive school culture for educators to work with students. If our policies remain the same it is tough for a school to make systematic changes within.

Leading Trauma-Sensitive School Policy

The emphasis at the Federal and State level in education policy has been centered on learning. Accountability in reading, math, and science lead the way in the current policies we currently follow. Policies that attempt to address the social and emotional well being of the students are seen in initiatives, such as, Multi-Tiers of Systems of Support (MTSS), Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS), Restorative Justice, Anti-Bullying Law, Graduation Rates, and Career and College Ready.

Federal Policy

Policy is created at the federal level which then impacts decisions at the state level. The US Department of Education signed by President Obama as the new education law on December 10, 2015 called Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This law provides the structure for schools advance equity within our disadvantaged populations,

create high standards, measure growth, and many more advantages. There was a focus on graduation rates and college and career (US Department of Education, para.4). The state, in response to federal policy, creates a plan that districts follow through on within state requirements.

State Policy

Minnesota Department of Education, in response to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), created 5 goal areas to increase student performance: all children are ready to start kindergarten; all third-graders can read at grade level; all achievement gaps between students are closed; all students are ready for career and/or post-secondary education; and, all students graduate from high school (MDE, 2019). However, many of these goal areas are learning-based and not what we have in the past called “soft skills”. The problem is that we know from research on trauma that students who experience traumatic things are not able to learn when they are in survival mode. This is from a lack of trust, a high state of toxic stress, disorganized attachment issues, and or any trauma responses (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017; Jennings, 2019).

In response to addressing the social and emotional needs of students the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), from a policy perspective included a push to incorporate; Multiple Tiers Systems of Support (MTSS), Anti-Bullying policy, Restorative Practices, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) (2015) has begun the process of creating resources for schools to focus on trauma-sensitive practices. They encourage practices with school initiatives using

Multiple-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS), Response to Intervention (RTI), and the anti-bullying bill.

Multiple-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in Minnesota relies on a tiered system of instruction to support and prevent school failure. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2015),

MTSS relies on multiple tiers of instruction that work together as a safety net to prevent school failure. The critical features of this school-wide framework include; Assessments, High-quality, evidence-based instruction, Core instruction, Tier 2 or supplemental interventions, Data-based decision making. (para. 1)

Multiple Tiers of Systems of Support (MTSS) framework and the NCTSN (2017) acknowledged that in order for the framework to be effective it needs to be spread throughout the system and not in isolation of one content or classroom (p. 4). The NCTSN (2017) takes the MTSS framework and further infuses trauma-informed practices addressing school environment/culture, community, and family partnerships (NCTSN, 2017, pp. 4-5).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is an evidence-based framework intended to be incorporated into school culture. The purpose of PBIS is to prevent problem behaviors while building positive and prosocial behaviors schoolwide, such as social, emotional, and behavioral skills (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2018; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS], 2019). According to PBIS (2019), the broad purpose

is to “ ... improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of schools and other agencies. PBIS improves social, emotional and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups” (PBIS home page, 2019).

PBIS is a framework or approach for helping schools select and organize evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. Implementing PBIS requires specific components to be effective for all students. These are defined by the expectations a school aligns with, and the ability to develop and implement a consistent system used by all staff. These components are: school-wide behavioral expectations, provide positive feedback that is consistent, acknowledge students who display school-wide behavioral expectations, create a consistent and specialized support system for students who do not display positive behaviors and expectations, make decisions based on data related to student progress, screen students that require additional behavior supports, use evidence-based interventions that integrate and align for academic and behavioral success for all students, and use a team-based approach to support effective implementation, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes (PBIS, 2015).

Minnesota Department of Education (2019) used PBIS as a state-initiated project that provides districts and individual schools with the training, coaching, support in order to improve student behavior. According to MDE (2019), PBIS implements an SEL program to support PBIS, “Consistent with Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.232,

subdivision 1, character education curriculum and programs may be used to support implementation of the key components of PBIS” (para. 4).

Trauma-Sensitive Policy

Programs like PBIS and MTSS do address the school environment and well being of the student in certain areas, however, trauma-sensitive whole school exhibits a much more comprehensive approach that impacts the whole school. According to Cole et al., 2013 “To achieve this important goal we need a broad policy agenda that engages every level of the public education infrastructure: national, state, district, regional, and local” (p. 87). This would achieve laws that reach the basic operations of the school instead of what Cole et al. 2013 felt is “siloed concerns of particular initiatives or programs” (p. 87). This would give the school the ability to think and plan in a whole school approach by engaging in an inquiry-based process of planning, self-reflection, and create effective local solutions. This is a more holistic approach where educators can create dynamic learning environments that reach the needs of their students that have experienced trauma (Cole et al., 2013). Through the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative a partnership of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School, Cole et al. (2013) prioritized six policies to aid policymakers in establishing the conditions that will enable educators to make trauma-sensitive part of the core educational mission of their schools. Cole et al. (2013) highlighted six recommendations:

1. All levels of government should articulate a clear, strong coordinated message that trauma-sensitive schools are a priority.

2. Laws, policies, and funding streams should support schools to create whole-school Action Plans that are organized according to core school operations.
3. Professional development for educators, administrators, and allied professionals should provide opportunities to develop a shared understanding of trauma's impact on learning and build skills in using a whole-school inquiry-based approach to creating trauma-sensitive schools.
4. Schools and outside agencies should collaborate to ensure services are an integral part of trauma-sensitive whole-school environments and that they connect students to their school communities.
5. Schools and districts need adequate staffing to perform the administrative functions necessary for effective implementation.
6. Law and policies should clarify that evidence-based approaches include those that encourage schools to engage in locally-based staff-driven evaluative inquiry. (pp. 88-92)

Within this policy, local schools would be able to implement a trauma-sensitive culture that meets the needs of their students and families. Another recommendation from Cole et al. (2013) is to incorporate the language in policy of “Safe and Supportive” and not “Trauma-Sensitive” Schools to incorporate other important educational reforms necessary for trauma-sensitive schools, such as bullying prevention, graduation rates,

truancy reduction, social and emotional learning, positive approaches to discipline, and more (Cole et al., 2013, p. 95).

What is Next

Reflecting on the literature review, Chapter Three will outline a case study designed in response to the research on trauma in Chapter Two. Understanding the psychological effects of trauma through the ACE's study and the awareness of the neurobiological effects of trauma on the body and response system, I wondered how this gets applied in practice at the school level. Research is extensive in understanding components of trauma-informed skills educators can use in the classroom, however, what does that look like in practice. Therefore, chapter Three outlines the study's significance, participants, and setting in which the study takes place. Next, chapter Three will outline the design of the case study, methods of data collection, and method of data analysis to answer the research questions: What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology: A Case Study

Research

My work as a teacher and instructional coach led me down the path of investigating trauma-informed strategies for schools. Childhood trauma has been a silent but present factor in education, however, through new research and a deeper understanding, we are just beginning to understand the devastating effects childhood trauma has on our schools and society (Cole et al., 2005; Craig, 2017; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Perry, 2006; Soures & Hall, 2016). This begs for a shift in how we approach students and their overall social and emotional health as we educate all students. With an understanding that trauma is real, present, and devastating, investigating how our schools support students in trauma is essential. Equipping teachers to work with students in trauma will increase student learning and even bring about healing a child with trauma (Cole et al., 2013; Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016).

In addition to individual schools, an increased awareness at the federal and state level has focused on the social-emotional needs of students (Cole et al., 2013; MDE, 2019). However, in practice, it can be a challenge to incorporate a truly trauma-sensitive culture. Many educators I work alongside express a lack of support and strategies to deal with students' psychological needs, however, support may be defined differently by every educator. Another challenge observed is changing a culture away from punitive practices, which are unproductive for students in trauma. Students experiencing trauma continue to fall behind their peers academically, socially, and behaviorally. Changing

perceptions and enhancing skills for educators in trauma and trauma's negative effect on learning will help build a culture that will increase learning (Cole et al., 2005).

Considering these factors a qualitative study was conducted that explored existing perceptions, understandings, and skills teachers have in regards to trauma-sensitive classroom practices in their instructional setting. According to Creswell (2014), "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Educators' beliefs and understanding create a school culture that affects students and their learning. Engaging in a qualitative study, data was collected that focused on individual meaning and insight to the complex problem of students dealing with trauma and the impact it has on learning and school success (Creswell, 2014).

The case study was conducted in the current district that I have worked in for the last 12 years of my career. Therefore, as McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined, I hold "a complete insider role" (p. 348). This role provides a unique perspective due to the knowledge of the setting, staff, procedures, and history of all professional development done within the setting. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, "A complete insider ... is a researcher who has an established role in the setting in which data are collected, engaging in genuine and natural participation" (p. 348). My role within the district is to provide professional development for the middle school staff, work with intervention students, and lead in many of our school initiatives supporting teachers. Therefore, I have a complete insider role as a researcher. I will be studying my own lived experience. As a researcher I will be aware of my lens to remain neutral as I conduct research. The

advantages of the insider role is the ability to see systems that would not be accessible to an outsider.

Research Paradigm and Rationale

In order to understand the existing perceptions, understandings, and skills of trauma-sensitive practices at the secondary level, educators from a rural district engaged in a qualitative study using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory, according to Creswell (2014), "... is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study" (p. 243). Doing a grounded theory approach offers a comprehensive look into the views of the educators in relationship to trauma-sensitive practices that are essential for students with trauma backgrounds. Furthermore, using current research on trauma and trauma-sensitive practices, this study informs areas that connect and do not connect to best practices. Additionally, the information gathered advises future professional development to support building capacity around incorporating a trauma-sensitive system of support for students in trauma and the work that needs to continue (Cole et al., 2005). This in-depth look at educators' existing perceptions, understandings, and skills around trauma-sensitive practices will add to the conversation and in turn give direction for future study (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Significance of the Study

Through continued research on childhood trauma such as the neurobiological responses, the student's ability to learn, the long term effects on learning and health, we now have a clear understanding of how important it is to help students at the school level.

Many components emerged from the literature review that highlighted essential factors needed to incorporate a trauma-informed school environment, however, I believe that implementing trauma-informed practices in the school environment can be unclear for many educators. Examining how that looks in practice is vital to understanding how schools can best serve all students. The significance in gathering data around educators' existing perceptions, understandings, and skills informs specific beliefs or barriers that need to be addressed when implementing a trauma-informed school environment. It is important to conduct research around actual trauma-informed practices, such as, discipline, academic engagement, de-escalating student stress, and pedagogical practices that support and assimilate trauma-informed practices into the school setting (Cole et al., 2013). This has led me to my questions: What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

Setting and Participants

This research focused on one rural district in Minnesota specifically at the secondary level grades 6-12. The overall district is made up of 10 or 2.3% administrators, 237 or 56% teachers, 29 or 6.9% other staff, 48 or 11.4% paraprofessionals and 102 or 24% other staff - including non-licensed staff (MDE, 2019). The district PreK-12 is comprised of six schools including a kindergarten center, 2 elementary buildings, 1 middle school, 1 high school, and 1 alternative learning program (ALP). For the purpose

of this study, the focus will be on the secondary schools and licensed staff. Beginning the 2018-2019 school year, the secondary level focused on trauma-informed practices for the first time. Each building built in 6 hours of professional development for all staff. The high school, which also includes the ALP staff, brought in an outside speaker to deliver three trauma-informed trainings for two hours each session. The middle school is focused on six one hour sessions throughout the school year. The professional development at the middle school was developed by the researcher and a middle school teacher. Currently, each school has had two hours of professional development on trauma. Although each building has approached professional development differently, the focus has been on defining trauma and the impact it has on the school environment.

Middle school students. The middle school serves 1,032 students in grades 6-8. Of those 1,032 students, 89 or 8.6% are Hispanic or Latino, 28 or 2.7% are two or more races, 17 or 1.6% are Black or African-American, 2 or 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native and 887 or 86% are White (MDE, 2019). There are four categories of special population documented through MDE: English learners, special education, free/reduced-price meals and homeless (MDE, 2019). According to the data 406 or 39% of students fall into these four categories; 23 or 2.2% English learner, 134 or 13% special education, 245 or 23.7% free/reduced-price meals and 4 or 0.4% homeless (MDE, 2019).

Middle school staff. The middle school has 50 or 59% licensed teachers, 5 or 6.5% other licensed professionals, 20 or 24% other licensed or non-licensed staff, and 2 or 2.3% administrators (MDE, 2019). The breakdown of the staff's race/ethnicity is 61 or 100% white (MDE, 2019). According to MDE (2019), seventy-four percent of the middle

school staff has ten years or more teaching experience, almost twenty-three percent have three to ten years of service, and three percent have less than three years of experience. In middle school, seventy-four percent hold a master's degree and twenty-six percent hold a bachelor's degree (MDE, 2018).

High school students. The high school serves 1,215 students in grades 9-12. Of those 1,215 students, 97 or 8.0% are Hispanic or Latino, 25 or 2.1% are two or more races, 21 or 1.7% are Black or African-American, 8 or 0.7% American Indian or Alaska Native and 1,045 or 86% are White (MDE, 2019). There are four categories of special population documented through MDE, English learners, special education, free/reduced-price meals and homeless (MDE, 2019). According to the data 429 or 35% of students fall into these four categories; 10 or 0.8% English learner, 159 or 13.1% special education, 254 or 21% free/reduced-price meals and 6 or 0.5% homeless. In 2018 277 students or 95.2% graduated (MDE, 2019).

High school staff. The high school has 73 licensed teachers, 9 other licensed staff, 20 or 21% other licensed or non-licensed staff, and 2 or 2% administrators (MDE, 2019). The breakdown of the staff's race/ethnicity is 72 or 99% white and 1 or 1.4% two or more races. Seventy-one percent of the teachers have ten years or more experience. Twenty-nine percent of the teachers have three to ten years and zero percent have less than three years of experience. Sixty-six percent of the teachers hold a master's degree and thirty-two percent hold a bachelor's degree (MDE, 2018.).

Alternative program. The alternative program currently serves 22 students in grades 9-12. Of those 22 students 2 or 9% are Hispanic or Latino, 1 or 4.5% are Black or

African-American, and 19 or 86% are White (MDE, 2019). Of the 22 students, 0 students fall in the category of special population (MDE, 2019). In 2018, when the study began, the data breakdown of special categories was much higher, two students were identified as English Language (EL), two students are identified as Special Education, and sixteen are Free/Reduced Priced lunch (MDE, 2018). The teaching staff is made up of four teachers and a shared (.33) administrator. Of those four teachers, twenty-five percent have ten years or more of service. Fifty percent have three to ten years of experience and twenty-six percent have less than three years of experience (MDE, n.d.). Seventy-five percent have their bachelor's degree and twenty-five percent hold a master's degree. According to MDE (2018.), three of the four teachers have a license to teach and one is on special permission.

Secondary students ACE score. In the spring of 2019 the students participated in the Minnesota Student Survey put out by an interagency team that includes Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Human Services, and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (2019). This survey was administered online to the 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th graders. The survey was made up of lots of data on different perceptions students have on their lived experiences in the school and home settings.

Table 1
ACE Study n=

	8th Grade Females	8th Grade Males	9th Grade Females	9th Grade Males	11th Grade Females	11th Grade Males
1 or more ACE	59%	54%	54%	40%	59%	47%
2 or more ACE	34%	21%	27%	20%	36%	27%
3 or more ACE	18%	13%	20%	13%	21%	14%
4 or more ACE	11%	5%	12%	7%	16%	5%

One section of the survey gave each 8th, 9th, and 11th graders the ACE test (see Table 1). The data revealed that 54% of our 8th grade males had 1 or more ACE, The female groups typically scored a higher percent overall. The eighth grade survey took out the two questions that asked about sexual abuse, therefore the score may have been higher. In the 9th and 11th grade results, the higher percentage tended to be the questions pertaining to sexual abuse. Females had a higher risk of sexual abuse then their male peers. The three questions that scored the highest among students overall was, living with someone who was depressed or had mental illness, parents in the home that regularly swore at or insulted them and or put them down, and had a parent or adult in their home hit, beat, kicked, or physically hurt them. This is a major concern considering the major health implications for students as they move into adulthood. Moreover, looking at the trauma students are dealing with by 8th grade, when over half of the student body has 1 or more ACE is a concern for behavior, concentration, and academic concerns.

Therefore, this study gathered data on one district's secondary educators' perceived understanding, skills, and beliefs around the trauma-informed whole school approach using a case study method of research. The data informs the research questions, What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

Through this study the secondary staff participated in a survey, observations, and a focus group that gave insight to the staff. More data was collected through the document review on policies, staff and student handbooks, and other school documents. In the next section, I will define the case study and each component of the study methods used to inform the research question.

Case Study

A case study was conducted to gather an in-depth, up close, and personal look into the phenomenon between research on trauma-informed schools and the challenges of applying research into tangible application. In order to do that the case study is comprised of a survey, document collection, observations, and a focus group. According to Yin (2018), "Case studies allow you to focus in-depth on a 'case' and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective ..." (p. 5). The benefit of engaging in a case study is the ability to use many different ways to collect data, such as surveys, documents, direct observations, and focus groups to gain an up-close look (Yin, 2018, p. 12). This case study relied on multiple sources of evidence to bring awareness into how one district applies best

practices to create a trauma-informed culture for students. Furthermore, gaining insight into educators' understandings, perceptions, and skills in trauma-sensitive practices will inform how the system responds. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that a case study's purpose is to, "provide an understanding of an abstract concept, such as school-based management, from the participants' social experience" (p. 325).

Data collection tools. To clearly define trauma and trauma-informed classroom practice within one district, the researcher used four principles outlined by Yin (2018) to maximize the data methods used (Yin, 2018, p. 129). These four principles described by Yin (2018) include using multiple sources of evidence, a study database, a chain of evidence, and exercise care when using data from social media sources (pp. 126-137). The purpose of using multiple sets of data collection methods is to triangulate data to gain a deeper understanding of application for school leaders (Yin, 2018, p. 127). Furthermore, conducting observations, a focus group, and looking at documents can lead to the emergence of relevant concepts and themes to inform the actual implementation process (Yin, 2018, p. 169). The study began by sending out the survey to all certified staff within the district's secondary schools.

Survey. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) wrote that "Surveys are used to learn about people's attitudes, beliefs, values, demographics, behavior, opinions, habits, desires, ideas, and other types of information" (p. 234). Understanding this, the objective of collecting data using a survey was to focus on the secondary staff's existing perceptions in regard to trauma and trauma-informed best practices. More so, the expressed perceptions, understandings, and skills they hold as they make decisions with

curriculum, rules, discipline, and other educational practices. To go a step further, this study looked at how educator's perceptions, understandings, and skills get translated or applied to trauma-informed practices that impact the student culture.

The survey was conducted during the month of March, sent out to all certified staff within the district's secondary setting, totaling 160 secondary educators (see Appendix B). The researcher's survey was sent out through a school-issued email from the district's Superintendent. The district staff is familiar with Google, therefore, the survey was designed using a Google Form in order to simplify the ease and use of the survey tool for the participants. Another advantage of using Google Form is the ability to compile, sort, and analyze complex data in order to see emerging themes. The survey was piloted before being sent out to the target audience. Pilot testing ensured the instructions were clear and identified changes before sending them out to staff (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 237). Additionally, it gave an estimated amount of time it would take participants to answer the survey.

Another survey was sent out to the secondary administration comprised of four principals and one dean of students (see Appendix F). The principal survey was designed to understand trauma and their readiness to lead a trauma-sensitive whole school approach. The survey gets to their expressed beliefs on the importance of a trauma-sensitive whole school.. In a trauma-sensitive whole school approach, the leadership needs to be ready to lead the movement (Cole et al., 2005; Cole et al., 2013).

Both teacher and administrator surveys were designed to give insight into the beginning stages of implementation of trauma-informed practices. The data collected

identified themes on educators' and administrators perceptions, skills and understandings and further gained insight into how better to transition what they know of best practices in trauma-informed and how it's implemented into daily practice. The next steps in the data collection was to conduct classroom observations, focus group, and data collection.

Document collection. Appendix C. District and school level documents were collected for the study that outlines district and building policy outlining rules, expectations, and discipline. Due to the district's established culture, it is vital to examine documents with a new trauma-informed lens. Yin (2018) stated that artifacts, when relevant, "can be an important component in the overall case study" (p. 125). When examining an established culture, many policies created are rarely questioned unless further examined with a different lens. Much of education and society as a whole work from a punitive nature of discipline practices yet when working with the impact of developmental trauma restorative practices are encouraged. The evaluation of district and school policies to the alignment of trauma-informed best practices will highlight the direct impact research has on actual practice within the school environment.

Participant-observations. Participant-observations are a mode in which the observer has a variety of roles and actually participates in the actions being studied which are done in a culture or social group (Yin, 2018). The advantages of this vantage point is an opportunity to have an inside perspective, moreover, it also gives the researcher the ability to get close to the study that an outsider would not have access to (Yin, 2018).

The observations conducted helped to see how trauma-informed practices are applied in a real-world context and how it aligns with instructional leaders' stated

perceptions, understandings, and skills (see Appendix D). Observations were done on a formal and informal basis. The researcher asked a variety of teachers from several different content areas and grade levels 6-12. A sampling from each building was selected first with the attempt to get 3 teachers from the middle school, 3 teachers from the high school, and 2 teachers from the ALP. However, due to time constraints at the end of the school year, coaching schedules, and various other unavoidable issues, the researcher was able to get two teachers from the high school, one teacher from the ALP, and 5 teachers from the middle school. Teachers from a variety of content and grade levels were observed, such as; ALP math, high school government, middle school math intervention, special education at the high school and middle school, 7th-grade history and language arts, 6th-grade elementary language arts, and middle school art. The formal observations were done three times in each of the 8 classrooms within the study time frame and focused on the teacher during the 45 minute class period. What was observed was teacher behaviors, set structures and environment, and curriculum that are in line with trauma-informed practices. An observation form was created in order to observe each class with fidelity (see Appendix D).

Focus group. A focus group was formed and conducted using the eight individuals who participated in the observations. A structure of questions was created and piloted before given to the participants to test for valid and clear questions. The focus group was done at the close of the observations which was a nice wrap-up discussion after the observations. The focus group began as eight participants but ended up being 6 participants. Two of the eight participants had coaching obligations that were

unavoidable. The focus group was a great opportunity to have rich conversations in a social setting adding to the depth of observational information previously collected. The researcher facilitated the discussion using what McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described through “posing initial questions and periodic questions” (p. 363) (see Appendix E). During the focus group, the researcher videotaped the session and used a transcribing company to transcribe the data for coding. The transcription was then coded into themes that emerged from the data. The focus group was facilitated and coded by the researcher in order to find the emerging themes from the educators’ experiences.

Grounded Theory

Within the case study, I used grounded theory to construct meaning from participants responses in the survey, the focus group, and observations, as well as the document data collected. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined grounded theory as a way “to discover or generate a theory that explains central phenomena derived from the data” (p. 346). It is also a way to “... describe and explain the actions of individuals or groups” (p. 346). Through coding, I was able to develop specific categories and formulate specific theories from the participant’s responses in the social context. Working with the data in a case study using a grounded theory approach gave me the opportunity to pour through the data, notice any patterns, analyze, and suggest additional relationships, this is called working the data from the *ground up* (Yin, 2018, p.169).

Data Analysis

Investigating through multiple tools gives the researcher the ability to discover themes that emerge to answer the research question: What are currently held perceptions,

understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices? In this case study, I used multiple points of data to look for themes, patterns, insights, and concepts working the data from the ground up to explore patterns that can lead to useful concepts (Yin, 2018, pp. 168-169). Looking for patterns in the research is examining the data in as many ways possible to understand the complex links to the participants' process, beliefs, and actions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Assumption. This case study was designed to explore an in-depth look at one district's move towards applying a trauma-sensitive culture throughout the district. Using a *ground up* theory of study (Yin, 2018, p. 169), the assumption is that this research will see emerging themes that will lead to a rich understanding of the participants' expressed perceptions, understandings, and skills while implementing and incorporating trauma-sensitive practices. Another assumption is, analyzing data and creating themes will lead to suggested concepts that can add to current methods of supporting systems into positive pedagogy around trauma-informed practices at the district to classroom level (Yin, 2018). This study is designed to inform the research questions, What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

Internal Review Board (IRB) Approval

The case study involves the participation of human subjects, therefore, the researcher participated in the internal review process through Hamline University before beginning the study. According to Hamline University (2019), “The purpose of the ... Institutional Review Board is to protect the rights and safety of research participants and to facilitate research activities” (para 2). The researcher went through the IRB process and obtained approval in February of 2019 to move forward with the study. In March of 2019, the researcher sent out the survey to all secondary staff in the participating district.

Conclusion

Taking a look at the needs of our students from the lens of their social-emotional needs is critical in today’s society. We know through research that students cannot turn trauma off when they walk into their school day which creates many learning and behavior challenges. We also know from research that creating schools to be trauma-sensitive can not only help students learn and grow but can also reverse some of the negative impact trauma has on the individual. For these very reasons creating a culture of trauma-sensitive practices seems like the thing to do. However, understanding research and actually changing practice can be a challenge in front of us. We have many challenges as an education system in order to make these changes, whether it is perceptions, understanding, or lack of skills.

As a coach, it is important to build an increased awareness around trauma and trauma-sensitive classroom practices so that students are kept in the classroom and in an environment where they are able to learn. As research has revealed, however,

trauma-sensitive practices need to be at a system level in order to create a safe learning environment throughout the students' day in order to be truly effective. My research questions, What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices? This study will hopefully gain insight into further learning that we can use to support systems and school personal in creating trauma-informed schools and classrooms while leading to insight into further areas of studies on this important topic.

What is Next

Chapter Four outlines the study, reports the data collected, and reports the themes from that emerged from the data. In Chapter Four I will report the data that was analyzed and coded from the survey, documents, classroom observations, and focus group. Each of the data collection tools had important themes that emerged. Next, chapter Five will draw correlations from the literature review and the data collected to report on four major learnings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Overview of Results

A case study was conducted as a means to get an up-close and in-depth examination of one school district's secondary schools as they transitioned into a trauma-informed environment. The main goal was to understand how perception, skills, and understandings impact actual practice in seven key trauma-informed instructional practices, as identified by the researcher. The secondary goal was to gain insight into the essential support schools and individuals require during the trauma-informed implementation process. The research questions are, What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embody trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

This chapter outlines the results of the case study data - conveying clarity and insight of participant's perceptions, understandings, and skills. Also, the chapter offers insight and analysis that addresses the research questions. Additionally, the data outlined in chapter four frames the discussion for chapter five on how to move forward in meeting the educational needs of students with a trauma background due to their disadvantage within the current educational environment.

Formulating results. The case study contained four methods to collect data, including survey, observation, focus group, and documentation review, producing qualitative data results that are analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Through coding, themes emerged within the participant's open-ended responses which I was able to compare intersectionalities within the data, analyzing and noting themes as they materialized. Henceforth, theories were "grounded" in the context of the phenomenon studied and outlined throughout chapter four.

The first data set that was collected was the survey data. The survey was sent out to the secondary staff at a rural district through email. The Superintendent of the school district sent the researcher's survey through email to all secondary teachers in the district.

Survey

The survey that was conducted assisted in framing different perceptions, understandings, and skills educators hold as they work with students impacted by trauma and its debilitating effects in a school setting. There were two surveys sent, one to certified staff called the *Teacher Survey* and the other one to secondary administrators called the *Principal Survey*.

Teacher Survey

The teacher survey (see Appendix B) as a means to understand the staff's perceived beliefs around trauma and trauma-informed culture. The survey focused on secondary certified staff and their level of understanding of trauma and how it is presented in a school setting. Furthermore, it was a way to gauge vital future staff needs to move into a trauma-informed practice district-wide. This dissertation study focused

primarily on the secondary setting even though the whole district is participating in making the transition.

Survey design. The survey data compiled data throughout the eight sections. The first section comprised of introductory questions that established background information such as: job duties, participants' school background, participants' academic support in their family structure, and why they chose teaching as a profession. Delineated through the combined research of Cole et al. (2013), Craig (2017), Souers and Hall(2016), and Sporleder and Forbes (2016), the next seven sections covered the key areas of trauma-informed environment; awareness, positive classroom culture, intentional instruction, restorative discipline, linking with mental health professionals, self-care, and professional development. Each section consisted of questions that participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Additionally, each section consisted of optional open-ended question(s) asking for a detailed response that was coded into emerging themes.

Participants. The survey was sent out via email to the school districts' middle school, high school, and alternative learning program (ALP) staff. This includes approximately 160 certified staff. Of the 160 certified staff, 65 surveys were completed. Each secondary school was represented in the survey results; the middle school had a total of 29 out of 65 participants, resulting in a 45% participation rate. At the high school level, including the high school and ALP, there were 36 out of 91 staff who participated, resulting in a 40% participation rate.

Years of teaching. The 65 participants ranged from 1-26+ years of teaching (see figure 3). Of the participants, 24% or 16 participants have been teaching 6-10 years, 23% or 15 participants have taught 11-15 years, 21% or 14 participants have taught 16-20 years, 11% or 7 participants have been teaching between 20-25 years, 14% or 9 participants have taught 26 plus years, 3% or 2 participants taught 1-3 years, and 5% or 3 participants taught between 4-5 years. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) (2018), higher than seventy percent of the staff in this district had 10 or more years of teaching which aligned with a similar percentage of participants that engaged in the survey. With this in mind, the participants were a good sample that represented the larger whole of certified staff at the secondary level.

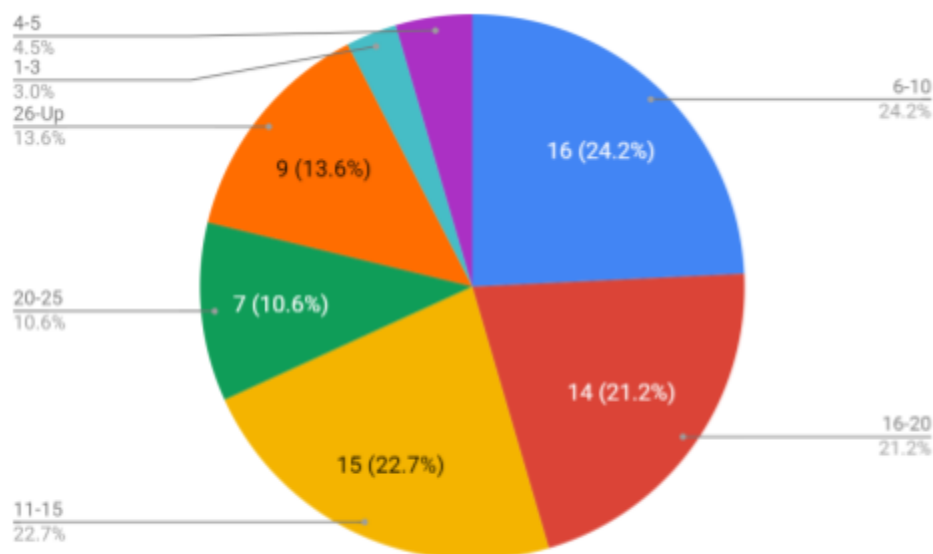


Figure 3. Question 1: Participants years of teaching.

Education level. Next, the survey gathered information on the participant's education level using the specific districts contract language for lane changes. Using the familiar contract language ensured that the majority of the staff would be familiar with

the levels and would most likely know where they are at on the identified scale used. The survey identified 5 levels of education. The highest percentage of participants fell into the Master's level of education range at 39% or 26 participants. The second-highest range was Masters +30 at 33% or 22 participants. Next, was the level of Undergraduate at 21% or 14 participants. Lastly, Masters +15 was 6% or 4 participants.

The next section of the survey gathered background information about job duties, participant's school background, participant's academic support in their family structure, and why they choose teaching as a profession. This section also asked general questions about their belief about trauma. This was deliberate to establish a comprehensive look at the participants' own experience and attitude towards education to see if that influences how they answer or approach the information on trauma-informed practices. To begin, information was gathered on the participants' years of teaching and education level.

Family involvement. To gather more information on the participant's background the survey asked two questions that focused on their own school experience and family support growing up (see Figure 4 & 5). This was measured using the 5 point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree.

The first question (see Figure 5) asked the staff their perception of whether education was a large focus in their family when they were a student. Strongly Agree, 47% or 31 participants, and agree, 32% or 21 participants was the highest percentage among participants. Almost 17% or 11 participants put neutral as their answer and almost 5% or 3 participants said disagree. Of the 65 participants, not one stated strongly

disagree, meaning that there was a large focus on education in the majority of participants.

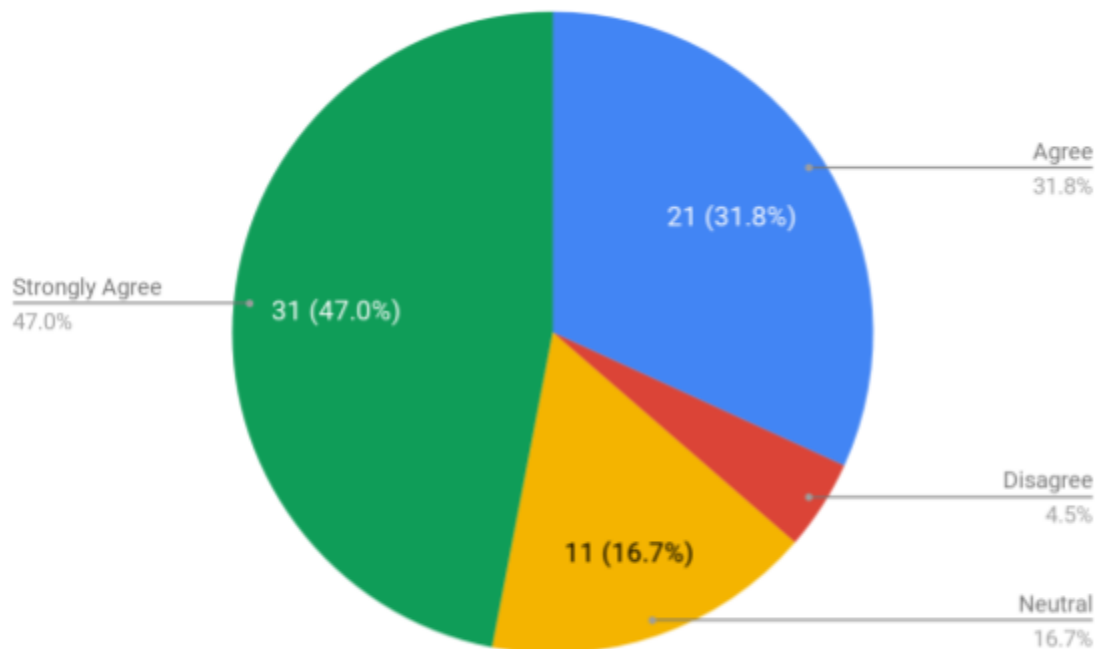


Figure 4. Question 2: Education was a large focus in my family when I was a student?

The second question in understanding staff's family involvement (see Figure 6) asked for them to state if their parents/guardians were involved in their school success. Answering on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree), 47% or 31 participants stated that they agreed that their families were involved in their school success. Strongly agree scored second to agree at 30% or 20 participants. However, 15% or 10 participants remain neutral and 6% or 4 participants disagreed that their families were involved in school success and almost 2% or 1 participant strongly disagreed.

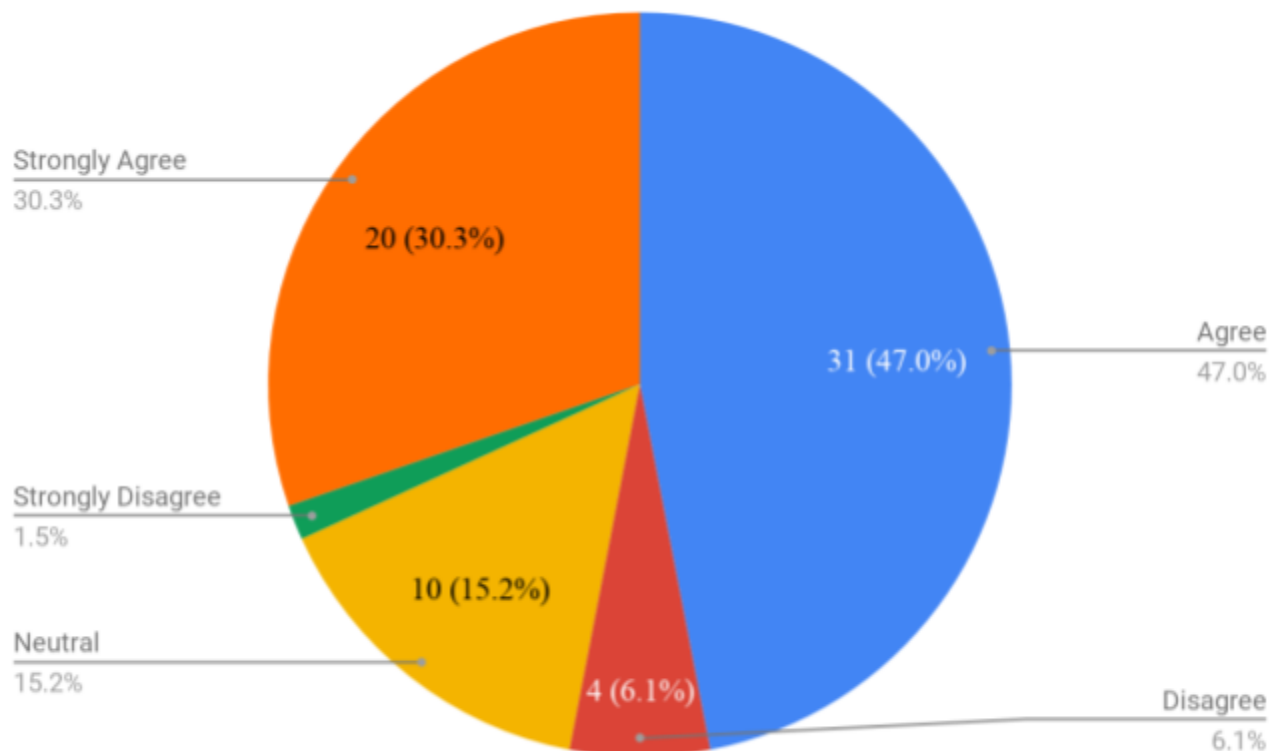


Figure 5. Question 3: My parents/guardians were very involved in my school success?

The majority of staff that participated choose strongly agree or agree for family involvement. However, a group of staff, ten to eleven participants, remained neutral in both questions. This resulted in taking a deeper look to see if the 10 participants remained neutral to both or if it was 10 different participants for each statement. Looking deeper, only 5 participants remained neutral to both statements in Figures 5 and 6.

The survey was designed to keep all open-ended questions optional. The open-ended questions helped dig deeper into the thinking of the participant and a chance for them to reflect further. The first open-ended question asked the participant why they chose to go into teaching. There were 61 participants that answered this question.

Looking at each person's response, themes emerged within the data. Staff explained fairly equally between two main reasons for going into teaching. These two reasons were first, to have an impact on students and secondly, the love of working with students. The next level of data revealed that some staff choose teaching because of the love of content and their own love of learning and school. However, overall the results showed that impacting student's lives and the love of working with students as being the fundamental reason for choosing teaching as a profession. The last section of the introduction really zeroed in on trauma and the staff's understanding of trauma.

Individual understanding of trauma. The last portion of the survey before beginning the seven pillars of trauma-informed practices was to do a check on how the participants felt they understood trauma using a scale of excellent, proficient, or not proficient (see Figure 6). This was an open-ended question with no definition provided. Staff felt that they understood trauma at a proficient understanding scoring 72% or 47 participants. Almost 22% or 14 participants felt their understanding was excellent. Almost 8% or 5 participants felt their understanding was not proficient.

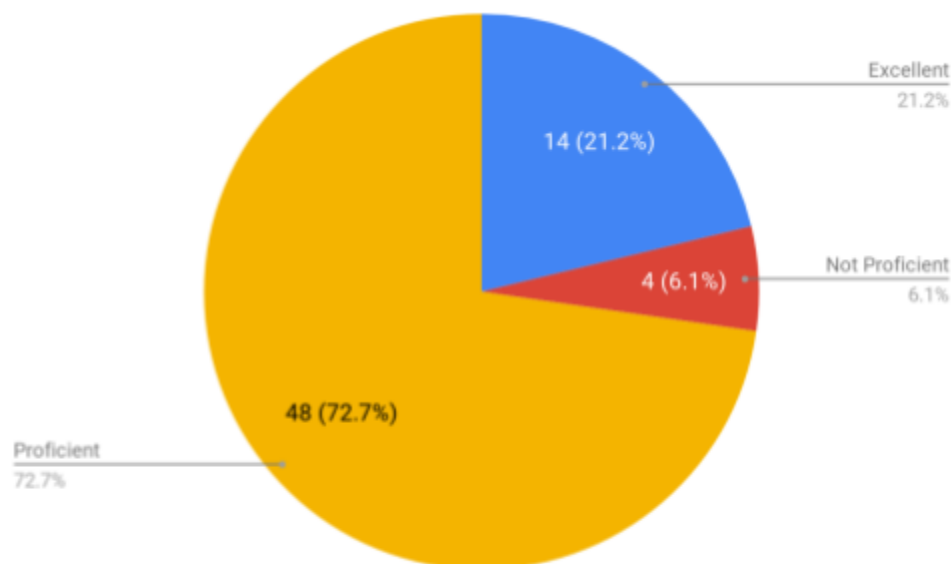


Figure 6. Question 4: Would you say that your understanding of trauma is ...

After getting an introduction of the participants the next seven sections are based on the pillars of trauma-informed environments; awareness, positive classroom culture, intentional instruction, restorative discipline, linking with mental health professionals, self-care, and professional development outlined in the multiple points of research (Cole et al., 2015; Craig, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016). When the survey was sent out to staff, the secondary level had engaged in some introductory training on trauma which covered concepts in Awareness and Classroom Culture. As an introduction to trauma, the training focused on three main points of awareness: trauma exists, trauma is present in our schools, and trauma impacts learning. The training also included information on the teacher's responsibility in decreasing the effects of trauma alongside some strategies to deal with in their classrooms. The high school had two separate pieces of training that equaled four hours and the middle school had three pieces

of training that equaled two and a half hours of training plus an hour of collaboration and application.

Seven Pillars of Trauma-Informed Practice

Awareness. The first of the seven pillars of trauma and trauma-informed environment is the participant's perceived awareness of trauma on learning and the learning environment. The survey asked seven questions using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. At the end of the Awareness section, there was one optional open-ended question. The survey asked seven questions that connect the staff's overall perception of trauma and the impact trauma has on student relationships and their brain development (see Table 2).

Data results. The results overall favored strongly agree, and agree. Four areas under awareness scored in the 80% range for strongly agree. These four areas are the belief that; trauma is real, trauma has an impact on the student's ability to learn, trauma impacts relationships with peers and adults, and trauma impacts student brain development which in turn impacts behavior. The research focused on the perceptions staff held about trauma and investigated staff's understanding of the effect it has on students' learning, relationships, and ability to self regulate. Souers and Hall (2016) called these *fundamental truths* about trauma. The data revealed that as a secondary staff the *fundamental truths* have been established in the areas of understanding trauma. The staff understands trauma as real and present in our schools today and that trauma impacts learning. The staff also understands that it is important to teach social-emotional skills to students in order to self regulate and form healthy conflict resolution skills.

Table 2
Awareness, n = 65

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe trauma is real and present in our schools today?	52 / 80%	13 / 20%			
I believe, trauma impacts a student's ability to learn.	54 / 83%	11 / 17%			
I believe trauma impacts a student's ability to trust adults and form healthy relationships with peers.	53 / 82%	11 / 17%	1 / 2%		
I believe trauma has a direct correlation to student success in the school environment.	45 / 69%	19 / 29%	1 / 2%		
I believe trauma impacts the development of a child's brain and therefore, impacts relationships, behavior, and learning.	52 / 80%	13 / 20%			
I believe teaching social and emotional skills in the school environment is important so students can develop healthy ways to deal with conflict?	45 / 69%	19 / 29%	1 / 2%		
I believe that teachers need to help build positive adult-student relationships because it is important to repair some of the effects trauma has on a student.	50 / 77%	14 / 22%	1 / 2%		

Open-ended question. The open-ended question in the Awareness section had 61 participants answer. The question asked, *Through your experience, what is the most important aspect of working with students and why?* The major themes that emerged within the staff's written responses were the importance of *building trust, relationships, and connections*. In all of these three areas, building trust, relationships, and connections,

it was referred to in the context of the relationship between staff (adult) to students. The importance of the adult student relationship was perceived to impact student learning, relationships, and overall culture. One participant stated,

Making connections have always been the most important aspects of working with kids. Making connections makes students feel important and cared for. When connections are made, students build trust and respect for others. When connections are made students do not fear making mistakes. They open themselves up to learning even when learning is very difficult.

Participants understood that it was vital to build trust, relationships, and connections with the students in their school in order for students to feel cared for, open up and learn. This data aligned with the research (Cole et al, 2005; Cole et al., 2013, Craig, 2017; Jennings, 2019; Souers & Hall, 2016).

Positive classroom culture. The next seven questions focused on educators' perceived understanding of classroom culture (see Table 3). Classroom Culture connects aspects of teaching social-emotional skills, classroom climate, and the environment to helping students in trauma. The survey asked seven questions using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. Once again, the majority of responses were, strongly agree and agree. At the end of the Classroom Culture section, there was one optional open-ended question.

Data results. The results substantiated that staff believes *they are responsible to set a positive classroom environment with structure, predictable routines, and consistency*. Furthermore, the participants believed that building trust with students and

making them feel safe is important for building a productive learning environment.

Participants strongly agreed and agreed at 100% that it is essential to communicate classroom expectations in a clear, concise, and positive way. Participants also strongly agreed and agreed at 100% that students are more likely to perform better in classrooms where they trust the teacher and feel safe in the classroom environment. Overall, the teacher felt classroom culture set the stage for success in the life of a student with a trauma background.

Table 3
Classroom Culture, n = 65

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think that teaching students Social-Emotional Skills will impact a student's behavior in a positive way.	36 / 55%	27 / 42%	2 / 3%		
I believe it is important to teach social-emotional skills to students within the classroom and school environment.	38 / 59%	25 / 39%	2 / 3%		
I believe that the choices I make in my classroom (discipline, structure, behavior) can have a direct impact on how a student behaves and learns?	51 / 78.5%	13 / 48%	1 / 2%		
I believe that it is important to communicate classroom expectations in a clear, concise, and positive way.	55 / 85%	10 / 15%			
I believe that goals for achievement should be consistently communicated to students.	39 / 60%	26 / 40%			
My classroom contains predictable routines that are attentive to the transitions and the sensory needs of all my students.	41 / 63%	22 / 34%	1 / 2%		
I believe that students are more likely to perform better in classrooms where they trust the teacher and feel safe in the classroom environment.	57 / 88%	8 / 12%			

Open-ended question. The open-ended question at the end of the Classroom Culture section had 61 participants answer the question. The question asked, *How do you incorporate a positive classroom culture with your students and what are some of the challenges you face each year?* As participants reflected on what it meant to incorporate a positive classroom culture with their students, three themes were consistently focused on throughout the data. The three themes that emerged were, *building relationships with students, setting an effective classroom culture and structure, and teaching social-emotional skills.*

As the researcher examined the data on what *building relationships* with students meant and what that looked like to the participants, the themes that emerged were trust, student voice, and teacher vulnerability. Participants believed that when working with students in the classroom you need to build trust. One participant was intentional to tell students, “I tell my students that my door is always open and that they should feel safe to talk to me or feel safe in my classroom.” Trust is built through creating an open-door environment where students could come to you if they needed anything. Trust was overall defined by participants, as building relationships with students and the students’ families. Another theme mentioned around *building relationships* was through building activities where student voices were valued. The main focus on student voice was on staff asking students about themselves and getting to know them personally. One participant stated what many said throughout, “I get to know my students on a personal level, asking about their hobbies, weekends, family relationships, jobs ... I participate in their conversations as appropriate, and I laugh and joke with them”. Another major theme that

participants mentioned was that building relationships required staff to be vulnerable.

Although only one participant used the word *vulnerable*, others stated ways that vulnerability shows up to their students. For example, participants said that they needed to be open, available, admit mistakes, to not have all the answers, and explore learning with students. These are examples of teacher vulnerability in the classrooms.

Creating an effective classroom culture and structure emerged from the data consistently. Participants perceived that setting a good classroom culture was done by making students feel safe with the staff and the classroom environment. Additionally, the staff felt that the way they responded to students was important. Staff reported that communication can be done in a lot of different ways, such as, in their body language, showing them compassion and empathy, and the positive interactions they have with their students' families. Another way that staff set a positive classroom culture was in how they set classroom structures. One participant stated, "I incorporate a positive classroom culture with my students by checking in with them, asking them how they are doing, expressing to them that I am here for them whenever they need me, especially if I sense that something is going on." Staff detailed out in their responses the importance of setting predictable routines, being consistent within the classroom, and having clear expectations.

Another area that emerged from the data was the importance of teaching social-emotional skills. The secondary level is currently piloting an SEL curriculum and participants referenced that during the survey. Six participants that incorporated teaching these skills within the classroom structure felt it had a positive influence on the students

learning. Others mentioned the importance of SEL yet was unsure how to fit that in. This also led to the many challenges staff felt were out of their locus of control.

There were several challenges in creating a positive classroom culture that staff felt were out of their locus of control and made it a challenge to set a positive classroom culture. Two areas most described in the data that challenged staff were what the students bring into the school environment and what the school decides that affect their classroom environment.

The first challenge was that the students bring many issues to the school environment. Over 75% of the participants reported the struggle to connect when they bring in so many struggles from their home environments. One participant stated, “Challenges I face are students not being able to leave their home life out of school. It always comes with them and affects how they are at school. You have to know each student so well so you know what they need day to day”. Another challenge stated was the student’s mental health issues. Even though this was mentioned throughout the data there was no expanded information on what staff meant when they said that mental health issues were a challenge.

The second challenge, what the school decides that affects their classroom environment. The challenges in the school environment were increased class sizes, schedule limitations, and time. Over half of the participants reported that because of the increased class sizes it was difficult to have good connections with students to meet their individual needs. This lack of connection was also mentioned in the limitation of the schedule. Participants felt that they did not have time to attend to students’ needs because

they did not have a lot of open time in the schedule. The last challenge mentioned was having a shortage of time overall.

Skills and instruction. The next ten survey questions were related to educators' perceived understanding of skills and instructions needed within a trauma-informed environment. The survey asked ten questions using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. Through the Skills and Instruction section of the survey, staff responded about their skills in identifying students in trauma, skills in setting up the classroom structure and instructing students in social-emotional skills. The responses had more variation between all areas of the Likert scale.

Data results. The data results in Skills and Instruction varied between most categories on the 5 point Likert scale. (see Table 4). In the areas that asked if teachers felt equipped to teach students in trauma 24 or 36.9% of the participants responded Neutral, 7 or 10.5% answered disagree, and 1 or 1.5% of the participants answered Strongly Disagree. This makes up 49.2% of the participants that perceived needing more skills. As the questions veered to classroom structure and management the data revealed that the participants felt more comfortable making those accommodations. However, in Skills and Instruction, a large amount of data was in the category of Neutral.

Table 4
Skills and Instruction, n = 65

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am able to recognize a student that is in a hypervigilant state	14 / 22%	27 / 42%	20 / 31%	4 / 6%	
I am familiar with accommodations I can make in the classroom to bring a student back to a regulated state of learning	12 / 19%	27 / 42%	20 / 31%	5 / 8%	1 / 2%
I structure classroom activities in a predictable and emotionally safe way for my students.	17 / 26%	40 / 62%	7 / 11%	1 / 2%	
In my classroom, opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotions and modulation of behaviors in the classroom.	16 / 25%	29 / 45%	15 / 23%	5 / 8%	
I create my classroom so students have a safe place to calm down and or gather themselves if needed in order to practice self-regulation.	20 / 31%	28 / 40%	16 / 25%	1 / 2%	
I set my instruction so that information is presented and learning is assessed using multiple modes.	18 / 28%	35 / 54%	12 / 19%		
Through lessons and classroom structure, opportunities exist for students to learn how to interact effectively with others	21 / 32%	35 / 54%	9 / 14%		
Through lessons and classroom structures, opportunities exist for students to learn how to plan and follow through on assignments.	16 / 25%	39 / 60%	10 / 15%		
When working with students, I try to consider the role that trauma may be playing in learning difficulties at school and give extra support when needed.	13 / 48%	27 / 42%	6 / 9%		1 / 2%

Open-ended question. At the end of the Skills and Instruction section, there was an optional open-ended question. The open-ended question had 61 participants give a response. The participants reflected on their skills and instruction by answering the question. *Through awareness, trauma-informed schools train and equip teachers with*

tools' to recognize when students need support and how to provide that support. Describe the training or skills you have gained that have helped you work with struggling students in your classroom and socially with you as their teacher or their peers.

The results were varied. In order to qualify the data, I placed the responses on a continuum of *no training* to *well trained*. As I dug deeper, I discovered that responses reflected the role the participants had and which building they came from. For example, the high school had a trainer from outside the building with no classroom experience, I delivered the training for the middle school, and then I had respondents that included social workers, SPED teachers, and counselors who had training within their field. High school participants felt that they had no training in actual classroom application and stated a need for more trauma training. One survey response was, "Honestly, I don't feel like I have much to be able to help the students effectively. Other than just talking with them and trying to keep them calm". Another high school respondent stated, "Any skills I have gained have been due to my own experiences and learning as a teacher (and a mom)".

The next place on the continuum was in the middle and demonstrated some ways they have applied strategies from the training they received. Middle school teachers felt that through training they have some strategies however, it is an introduction of strategies. For example, one participant stated, "Our training has focused on understanding what 'trauma-informed' means, types of trauma and recognizing behaviors that point to possible trauma-related behaviors. We have begun to talk about strategies that teachers can use to support these students". Other responses outlined things they

have learned in the training such as using a microphone so as a teacher you are not shouting to get students quiet, listening to students, staying calm to reduce student anxiety, and many more.

On the opposite end of the continuum, Special Education teachers, Social Workers, and Counselors felt this was their training. They were also open to sharing with others, strategies when working with trauma-informed work. My conclusion is that training matters. Training that is embedded and from someone who has experience in the classroom is more relatable to the skills teachers need. When training is provided, awareness is important, however, classroom strategies on how to deal with trauma responses, discipline, and families in trauma is essential.

Discipline. The next seven questions are on the educator's perceived understanding of discipline through restorative practices. The survey asked seven questions using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. The responses had more variation between all areas of the Likert scale.

Data results. The data results within this section had conflicting results with the open-ended question. For example, when asked if they understood restorative discipline versus punitive only 5 participants or 7.7% stated disagree and 10 participants or 15.4% put neutral, however, in the open-ended questions over 19 participants stated they did not understand restorative practices. (see Table 5). Another piece of data that stood out was the idea of suspensions as a good school practice. Out of 65 participants, 31 or 47.7% stated neutral, 10 participants or 15.4% agreed, and 1 participant or 1.5% stated strongly agree.

Table 5
Discipline, n = 65

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I understand restorative discipline practices versus punitive discipline practices	15 / 23%	35 / 54%	10 / 16%	5 / 8%	
Students' strengths and interests are encouraged and incorporated into my classroom.	30 / 46%	32 / 49%	3 / 5%		
When a student acts out, I understand what support I can give the student in order to keep them in the classroom and support their learning.	15 / 23%	42 / 65%	5 / 8%	3 / 5%	
Opportunities exist for confidential discussion with students on academic success and performance.	16 / 25%	28 / 43%	14 / 22%	6 / 9%	1 / 2%
With the understanding of trauma, my classroom discipline policies balance accountability to bring more restorative practices.	15 / 23%	39 / 60%	10 / 16%	1 / 2%	
I believe that suspensions are a good practice.	1 / 2%	10 / 15%	31 / 48%	16 / 25%	7 / 11%

Open-ended question. At the end of the Discipline section, there was one optional open-ended question. *What is your experience of restorative discipline practices and has this been effective in your practice?* Many participants reported that keeping students in the classroom and dealing with discipline in the classroom was essential to their learning. For example, one participant stated, “Very often, if I can sit down with the student and discuss their behavior in private, the outcome is much better” (Survey, 2019). Other participants used examples of using more proactive practices than reactive, such as; validating students, creating an environment to problem solve issues that arise, and understanding how to restore relationships when they break down. One participant stated, “I attempt to put into practice the restorative principles I’ve learned and this has led to

improved relationships with students as well as an effective means to changing behaviors in students” (Survey, 2019). A concern in the data was that 19 or 31% of the participants felt that they have no idea what Restorative Practices are and how to use them in the classroom. There is a large range of understanding of restorative practices that need to be addressed through quality professional development, possible using the educators that understand it well.

Linking with mental health professionals. Linking schools with mental health professionals examined the participant’s perceptions of the resources available to them when working with students in trauma. This begins with a baseline understanding if they are aware of what is currently available and if they have access to their expertise for students and their families. The survey asked five questions using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. The participant responses had variations between all areas of the scale.

Data results. Again, the results had a fairly equal distribution of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree with many participants choosing neutral. (see Table 6). When asked if they understood the resources available 21 participants or 32% felt that they did, however, 22 participants or 34% felt that they did not know the resources available. Again, 22 or 34% of the participants remained neutral. When asked if support staff is available for consultation, supervision, or teamwork 21 or 32% of the participants agreed, 22 or 34% remained neutral, and 22 or 34% disagreed. The participants were asked if flexibility was built into meeting with parents and resources, such as Interpreters and translated materials and 30 or 46% of the participants agreed, 18 or 28% remained

neutral, and 17 or 26% disagreed. Another aspect of working with students and families in trauma is the confidentiality of all communication. More participants felt that the communication remains within the bounds of confidentiality, 59 or 91% stated that they agreed, 4 or 6% remained neutral, and 3 or 5% disagreed. Not one participant picked strongly disagree. The last question asked if they felt they had regular assistance from mental health providers to get appropriate information about the students and families they work with, 27 or 42% agreed, 18 or 28% remained neutral, and 20 or 31% disagreed. The data shows a widespread understanding in regards to the support they need when working with students. Although many felt they understand where the mental health support was there was still a large percentage of educators that did not feel that they had the support they need. In a trauma-sensitive whole school approach it is vital that everyone understands all of the resources and supports given to each student that they work with (Cole et al., 2005; Cole et al., 2013, Craig, 2017).

Table 6

Linking with Mental Health Professionals, n = 65

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am familiar with all of the resources available in our district to help our students in trauma.	5 / 8%	16 / 25%	22 / 34%	21 / 32%	1 / 2%
In my experience, support for staff is available on a regular basis, including supervision and/or consultation with a trauma expert, classroom observations, and opportunities for teamwork.	3 / 5%	18 / 28%	22 / 34%	17 / 26%	5 / 8%
In my experience, strategies to involve parents are tailored to meet individual family needs and include flexibility in selecting times and places for meetings, availability of interpreters, and translated materials.	4 / 6%	26 / 40%	18 / 28%	15 / 23%	2 / 3%
When working with families, all communications respect the bounds of confidentiality.	17 / 26%	42 / 64%	4 / 6%	3 / 5%	
Staff has regular opportunities for assistance from mental health providers in responding appropriately and confidentially to the students and families I work with	6 / 9%	21 / 32%	18 / 28%	17 / 26%	3 / 5%

Open-ended question. At the end of the Linking with Mental Health Professionals section, there was one optional open-ended question. *The students and families that we work with have a variety of needs. What resources do you feel schools need to help teachers get support when working with students and families?* Many of the open-ended

responses given by the participants were in three general areas of support; more mental health support for school and families, embedded professional development, more communication and transparency for teachers.

The top common theme that emerged within the data was the need to have more in-school support when working with students. This was communicated in three different ways. First, the majority communicated that we needed more school-based Social Workers and Counselors, the ratio of students to the Social Worker or Counselor is about one thousand to one. According to the American School Counseling Association (as cited in Plumb et al., 2016), the recommended ratio for school counselor in regular education is 1 to 250 students and in a high needs school, it is recommended to have a ratio of 1 to 50 students (p. 48). Secondly, many participants felt that Social Workers and Counselors should not be doing lunch duty or other duties during their day because teachers are not able to get help for students during that time of day. Thirdly, participants felt that there should be more access to outside resources that supported a student's mental health needs. Although there was more than one that mentioned this, one participant, in particular, stated that the resources are there for students, however, many families do not have the insurance or money to pay for these outside resources, stating, "A lot of times we see issues come up when families do not have adequate insurance to pay for services that would be beneficial." Therefore, this participant felt that the resources needed to be free or a resource to help with funding the important assistance needed.

Embedded professional development emerged as a need for staff when helping students. Embedded professional development was mentioned by two-thirds of the

participants. Two strategies emerged in the data. First, was the continued training around trauma-informed classroom strategies and application. Secondly, embedded professional development time to collaborate with peers on different methods and ways to work with students that have trauma that needs more support.

Communication also emerged from the data as important to participants.

Communication was driven by two modes when looking at resources while working with students. First transparency came to the top and was defined by making a list of resources available that each staff member would have access to that staff could reference when a need arose with a student or family. On the flip side, communication was mentioned on the specific needs of the students. When working with students teachers felt that they do not get enough information on students that would help them serve the students' needs if they had access to that information.

Self-care. The next five questions are on the importance of self-care within the life of staff in a trauma-informed environment. Self-care is support available, letting go of student problems, or work relationship struggles. The survey asked five questions using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree.

Data results. Within the data set on self-care, there was a consistent number of participants that answered, *neutral*, throughout the four questions asked. As the data was analyzed the researcher began to see a small difference between teachers taking care of themselves and not taking student or work issues home and taking home the struggles of the day. (see table 7). Overall, thirty-two (59%) teachers had consistent self-care routines compared to the eighteen (28%) teachers that did not have good self-care routines. On the

flip side, thirty-two (49%) teachers have a hard time letting go of student problems and take it home with them compared to the fifteen (23%) teachers that report they are able to not take student problems home. However, twenty-five (38%) educators reported that they sleep well at night and do not worry about school until the next day while twenty-two (34%) reported that they do not sleep well and worry about their job.

Table 7
Self-Care, n = 65

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
When I am working with students I incorporate a consistent self-care routine in order to unwind and destress after a difficult day.	3 / 5%	29 / 44%	16 / 24%	16 / 24%	2 / 3%
As a teacher, I have a hard time letting student problems or struggles go and many times take it home with me.	10 / 15%	22 / 33%	19 / 29%	14 / 21%	1 / 2%
More times than not, I feel agitated and annoyed at the things that go on during the school day. (Examples may be, student behavior, other teachers, schedules, decisions out of your control, etc.)	7 / 11%	19 / 29%	17 / 26%	19 / 29%	4 / 6%
Most nights I sleep well and do not worry about my job or students until I am back at work the next day..	4 / 6%	21 / 32%	19 / 29%	16 / 24%	6 / 9%

Open-ended question. At the end of the Self-Care section, there was one optional open-ended question. *How do you feel about self-care as a necessary practice in teaching and what does that look like in your life?* The data compiled from the participant's responses showed insight into the teacher's perceived view on self-care. Two themes

emerged in the data; staff that does self-care, and staff that think it is important however, do not practice it.

There were 32 out of 61 or 52% of the participants stated a need and importance for self-care but often professed that it was hard to maintain in the business of teaching. One participant stated, “Self-care is important but I do not have time”. The majority of expressed barriers to self-care were work demands, family needs, and personality. Work demands were one of the leading expressed rationalizations for not putting self-care as a priority. Work demands, defined in this category as something they cannot let go of once they leave work. This was stated in a variety of ways, such as, student concerns or problems that make them worry and taking care of the workload that was not finished during the day. One participant summed up the struggle well by stating,

I feel that self-care is extremely important - how can you help others if you are not in a good place? However, it is easier said than done. I personally take on so much of what my students are going through and worry about them, and I am constantly thinking about what I can do to help them, what I should do, etc. it can be very taxing on my own well being.

Many expressed that they have a hard time not taking work home and it would affect their own family time in a negative way. Another interesting find in the data was the idea of personality. Many stated that this is just the personality of a teacher, taking care of everyone's needs first and then maybe think of their own needs after.

On the opposite end, 30 out of 61 or 49% of the participants expressed the belief that self-care is essential to life as an educator and practiced it regularly. A participant

stated, “It is a must! Teachers need to take the time to work on themselves as a person, not just as a profession”. Practices that emerged from the data was, taking care of their health, downtime, and time with family and friends. Taking care of your health resulted in activities, such as exercise, eating right, and other health-related care. The second most-often self-care activity was mentioned as downtime, such as reading, relaxing, games, and Netflix. Next, 35 or 57% of the participants mentioned that spending time with family and friends was essential in their self-care but the interesting thing about this data was that it was mentioned in tandem with the health care and downtime and not on its own.

Professional Development. Two questions were about the staff’s opinion on the importance of professional development in order to continue learning about a trauma-informed environment. The survey asked two questions using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. Further questions asked specific topics they have received training and where they felt more training was essential.

Data results. Staff overall felt it was important to engage in ongoing professional development in trauma, 61 or 94% agreed and 4 or 6.2% remained neutral. (see Table 8). Reflection on teaching is an important aspect of professional development. However, there was a slight change in the data when participants were asked if professional development should be focused on using reflective practices on personal beliefs. It helps a teacher to understand their own beliefs, judgments, and biases. When working with students in trauma teachers need to be sensitive to others and aware that their experiences

are different than their students' experiences (Cole et al., 2013; Craig, 2017). When asked if reflection on teaching practices are essential, 58 or 89% agreed, 6 or 9% remained neutral, and 1 or 1.5% disagreed. Even though this is a slight shift, the participants showed the importance of professional development. The data did reveal that some participants are not clear about how personal beliefs can impact instruction and how they relate to students. Therefore, it is essential that educators reflect on implicit and explicit biases and beliefs that impact the learning environment for students in trauma.

Table 8
Professional Development, n = 65

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To continue learning about trauma and trauma-informed practices I believe that some type of ongoing professional development opportunities should be available?	30 / 46.2%	31 / 47.7%	4 / 6.2%		
Personal reflection on teaching practices and personal beliefs are essential to explore in order to help my work with all students.	32 / 49.2%	26 / 40%	6 / 9.2%	1 / 1.5%	

Secondly, staff filled out topics they felt they had training in and training they felt they still needed to receive. The data aligned overwhelmingly with the training staff has already received which was trauma and who it affects and how to build positive classroom culture. The topics listed included: what trauma is and who it affects, creating

positive classroom culture, trauma-informed instruction, restorative discipline, working with mental health professionals for students, and the importance of self-care.

The two top topics, awareness, and positive classroom culture, that staff felt they had the most training in aligns with the data. Awareness showed that 100% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed and in positive classroom culture, 95%-100% agreed or strongly agreed (see Tables 2, p. 97 & Table 3, pp. 99). Both topics were covered by the embedded professional development (EPD) staff had been given at the secondary level. As far as defining what trauma is and how the staff feels around understanding trauma, 88% of the staff feels confident and 71% felt they had been trained in creating positive classroom culture (see Figure 7).

Training data results. Participants were asked to identify the training they had received (see Figure 7) and the training they would like to have (see Figure 7). The results followed the trend of topics that were already addressed in previous professional development (EPD). Understanding trauma and positive classroom culture were addressed in EPD and this showed in the data on topics received. The topics that have not been addressed in EPD, for example, restorative discipline, stated they would like more training (see Figure 7). The last four categories were the topics people wanted more information on trauma-informed instruction (49%), links to mental health professionals (71)%, restorative discipline 62%, and the importance of self-care (46%).

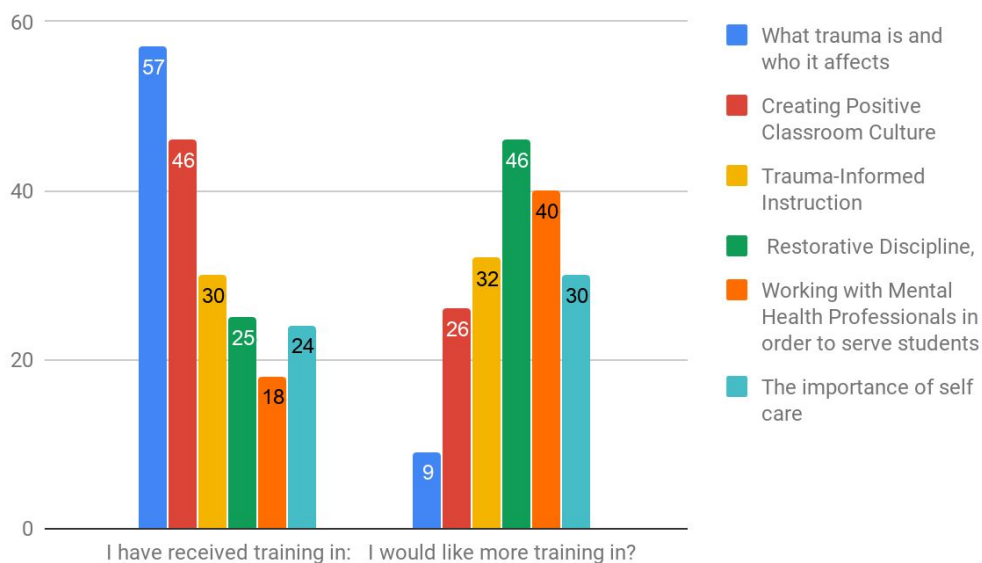


Figure 7. Professional Development

Teacher Survey Conclusion

The researcher gained insight into the staff's understandings and beliefs around the seven pillars of trauma-informed schools. As the district is working to implement a more trauma-informed environment the secondary schools engaged in professional development in two of the seven pillars. The areas focused on professional development was Awareness and Classroom Culture. The survey revealed that the staff had a more consistent understanding of these two areas across all participants. However, where professional development was not the focus, participants' responses were more varied. Something that stood out in the data was that some staff shared getting training outside of the district on trauma-informed practices on the seven pillars. The participants that had outside training shared that they were able to implement concepts at an individual level,

however, they found it difficult to influence change outside of their classrooms or position.

Principal Survey

The Principal survey (see Appendix F) was a means to gain insight into the leaders of the high school, middle school, and ALP. Also, to get to their perceived beliefs around trauma and trauma-informed culture. The survey was sent out to six administrators and four of the six responded. Gaining insight, the survey was to determine their level of understanding of trauma and how it is presented in a school setting. The survey was similar to the teacher's survey, however, had slight changes to reflect their position and leadership.

The survey showed that the Principals understood what trauma was and what trauma-informed school environment was. The four that filled it out had similar scores and scored strongly agree and agree in most categories with a few neutral answers. According to the survey results, all four administrators are on board in each of the key instructional practices.

Seven Pillars of Trauma-Informed: Principals

Awareness. The survey helped gain insight into the administrator's perceived awareness about trauma and its presence in their school buildings and whether or not they believed trauma had an impact on learning. There were seven questions that used a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree..

Data results. Administrators had answered most questions using strongly agree or agree. This means that the administrators believe that trauma is real and present, impacts

learning and impacts all relationships. Furthermore, they believe that schools needed to teach social-emotional skills (SEL) and that teachers need to build healthy relationships with students.

Table 9

Awareness, n = 4

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe trauma is real and present in our schools today?	3/75%	1/25%			
I believe, trauma impacts a student's ability to learn.	3/75%	1/25%			
I believe trauma impacts a student's ability to trust adults and form healthy relationships with peers.	3/75%	1/25%			
I believe trauma has direct correlation to student success in the school environment.	2/50%	2/50%			
I believe trauma impacts the development of a child's brain and therefore, impacts relationships, behavior, and learning.	2/50%	2/50%			
I believe teaching social and emotional skills in the school environment is important so students can develop healthy ways to deal with conflict?	1/25%	3/75%			
I believe that teachers need to help build positive adult-student relationships because it is important to repair some of the effects trauma has on a student.	3/75%	1/25%			

Open-ended question. The question that was posed to principals asked, *through your experience, what is the most important aspect of working with students and why?*

All four administrators believed that building strong relationships with students was the most important aspect of working with students. All four administrators mentioned building trust as a vital part of building relationships with students in order to get to the

learning. One administrator represented a combined sentiment stating, “Listening and understanding their 'why'. Building relationships to develop trust to support them. Creating this foundation allows us to layer on more complex learning both academically and emotionally.” The administrators were very aligned in their responses about what was most important in the work we do, building relationships.

Classroom culture. Understanding administrators perceived understanding of what the classroom culture should represent. Administrators spend time in classrooms, evaluate staff on the classroom environment. However, classroom culture is not only about routines and structure but how teachers engage in the social context of the classroom. There were seven questions that used a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree.(see Table 10).

Data results. The data revealed that administrators believe that SEL should be taught, teachers make classroom decisions that impact student’s behavior and learning, expectations need to be clear, and that trust impacts performance. One participant choose neutral when asked if they look for predictable routines during classroom observations.

Table 10

Classroom Culture, $n = 4$

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that teaching students Social-Emotional Skills will impact a student's behavior in a positive way.	1/25%	3/75%			
I believe it is important to teach social-emotional skills to students within the classroom and school environment.	1/25%	3/75%			
I believe that the choices made in the classroom (discipline, structure, behavior) have a direct impact on how a student behaves and learns?	2/50%	2/50%			
I believe that it is important to communicate classroom expectations in a clear, concise, and positive way.	2/50%	2/50%			
I believe that goals for achievement should be consistently communicated for students.	2/50%	2/50%			
When conducting observations, I look for predictable routines that are attentive to the transitions and the sensory needs of the students.	2/50%	1/25%	1/25%		
I believe that students are more likely to perform better in classrooms where they trust the teacher and feel safe in the classroom environment.	4/100%				

Open-ended question. The classroom culture is an important aspect of the student's day and a large part of where principals observe and evaluate teachers progress. Therefore, the survey question asked them to, *describe briefly what you believe the classroom culture should look and feel like when you walk into a teacher's classroom?* When describing the classroom environment, 4 out of 4 administrators stated that they look for engaged learners, welcoming environment, and structured classroom. One

administrator stated, “It should look like there are people engaged. These engaged souls should be empowered to make mistakes, take calculated risks and own their own learning. There will be times of quiet and times of excitement. You should hear both ends of the spectrum every lesson. Collaboration, discussion and problem-solving should be the sparks that you can see and feel...” The administrators were also aligned in their understandings and beliefs about the classroom culture.

Skills and instructions. Skills and instruction had three questions about their perceptions on whether or not staff had the tools to work with students in trauma, if they could recognize a dysregulated student or adult, and if they had accommodations to aid in getting students back into a regulated state. The questions were asked using a 5 point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. (see Table 11).

Data results. The results were spread out between strongly agree and Neutral for each of the three questions. (see Table 11). The participants all stated neutral on whether or not they felt that the principals and teachers had the skills to work with a student who has a trauma background. The next question asked if they themselves can recognize a student, staff, or parent that is dysregulated, 1 or 25% strongly agreed, 2 or 50% agreed, and 1 or 25% remained neutral. The last question asked if they were familiar with accommodations to get students, staff, or parents back in a regulated state, 1 or 25% strongly agreed, 1 or 25% agreed, and 2 or 50% remained neutral.

Table 11

Skills and Instruction, n = 4

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that our district principals and teachers are equipped with the skills to work with students that have a trauma background.			4/100%		
I can recognize when staff, parents, and or students get into a dysregulated state.	1/25%	2/50%	1/25%		
I am familiar with accommodations I can make to bring staff, parents, and students back to a regulated state.	1/25%	1/25%	2/50%		

Open-ended question. Skills and Instruction are another part of administrators' summative evaluations during observations when looking at a teacher's performance in the classroom. The survey asked, *what instructional practices do you believe are essential for student success and should be present in your teachers classrooms?* The theme that emerged with all 4 administrators was formative assessment. After that the administrators had some overlap on ideas, such as, 3 out of 4 believed that expectations should be clear and 2 out 4 felt that opportunities to collaborate and hands on activities were important. However, formative assessment emerged as a constant theme. Within formative assessments, student feedback was mentioned by all 4 administrators.

The next question the survey asked was, *through awareness, trauma-informed schools train and equip teachers with the tools to recognize when students need support and how to provide that support. Describe the training or skills you believe are essential for your staff going forward.* All 4 administrators had various answers, however, one

theme emerged within the open-ended responses. One response highlighted how the teacher needs to understand themselves so that they are able to identify trauma in their students. One participant stated that the skills educators need is in “Understanding their own biases and backgrounds. Ability to identify our own needs in being trauma trained. Skills to identify trauma of others and steps to handle it moving forward”. The administration understands that educators need to do their own work when working with students in trauma.

Discipline. The participants were asked one question about discipline. The question asked if they understood restorative discipline practices versus punitive ones. There was not a description given, therefore, this is an open-ended question left up to the participant’s definition of restorative and punitive practices. The follow-up question helps to understand the participants understanding further. The question was asked using a 5 point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. (see Table 12).

Data results. The results revealed that the administration had a perceived understanding of restorative practices at 3 or 75% strongly agree and 1 or 25% agree. (see Table 12).

Table 12

Discipline, n = 4

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I understand restorative discipline practices versus punitive discipline practices.	3/75%	1/25%			

Open-ended questions. There were two open-ended questions asked of the administrators. The first question around discipline brought a variety of responses. The question was answered by 4 out of the 4 administrators. *What are the expectations around student discipline that is communicated (directly or indirectly) for teachers to follow when working with students?* The themes that emerged from the data is a consistent expectation that the teachers should be building relationships with students and families and should be the ones that deal with the discipline in the classroom. For example, the collective ideas were that educators should be clear with classroom expectations, communicate with parents, and use restorative practices instead of punitive through second chances.

The second question asked, *what are the challenges you face as a principal when dealing with discipline issues or behavior issues?* Three out of four participants answered the question. The administrators had a variety of answers, however, one theme that emerged as a challenge to dealing with discipline throughout their varied answers is how others handle the issue or believe the discipline issue should have been handled. One administrator stated, “Most people in our district want a place for students to go to get fixed (academics and behavior)...” and another came at it in a different way stating the belief that, “ ... every situation needs a consequence ...”. Another challenge mentioned was when the teachers let emotions get the best of them they have to manage the educators emotion before they can deal with the issue on hand.

Self-care. The participants were asked one question about self-care. The question asked if they believed self-care is essential for anyone working with students in trauma.

The question was asked using a 5 point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. (see Table 13) .

Data results. The data results show that the administrators understand that self-care is important in the work of educators. The results were 3 or 75% strongly agree and 1 or 25% agree.

Table 13

Self-Care, $n = 4$

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a principal, I believe self-care is essential for anyone working with students in trauma.	3/75%	1/25%			

Open-ended questions. Within the open-ended question, the survey asked, *How do you promote self-care among your teaching staff?* One participant stated that they try to promote self-care district-wide. They said, “I try to promote district wellness opportunities all of the time. I try to focus on a healthy culture every day...” Each administrator used examples of how they support self-care, for example, they stated that they give general accommodation for requests for time off, make connections with staff to understand their personal lives, try to support each other and have fun, and an overall promoting wellness opportunities district-wide. One stated that they, “Support family and family activities first, making connections with each staff to understand their personal lives and the demands they are experiencing”. Each administrator had various ways of supporting educators, however, 1 participant mainly talked about supporting through giving time off when staff needed it was the other two mentioned building a relationship

and putting family first. As I analyzed the data I felt that was two different approaches to self-care.

The second question under self-care was, *what improvements can be done to help promote self-care more effectively in your building?* Three out of the four administrators answered this question. They felt that we needed more strategies for staff, be able to offer more self-care than there currently is, and individualizing staff needs and not giving everyone the same. The participants were more aligned in what educators needed to know when looking at their own self-care.

Professional development. The participants were asked two questions about professional development. The questions asked if they believed ongoing professional development opportunities should be available and if it should be centered around personal reflection. The question was asked using a 5 point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. (see Table 14).

Data results. The data revealed that half of the participants strongly agreed that professional development should be ongoing and half felt neutral. However, all participants strongly agreed or agreed that personal reflection on personal beliefs is essential when working with students. (see Table 14).

Table 14

Professional Development, n = 4

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To continue learning about trauma and trauma-informed practices I believe that some type of ongoing professional development opportunities should be available?	2/50%		2/50%		
Personal reflection on teaching practices and personal beliefs are essential to explore in order to help teachers work with all students.	1/25%	3/75%			

Open-ended question. The participants varied in their answers for *when looking ahead to the needs of the students and families you serve, what professional development do you believe is the most essential and why?* The participants answered various topics we need to include in professional development. Topics, such as equity and differentiation, formative assessments, developmental stages of learning were among the various instructional skills mentioned. Another type of PD that participants stated was on building relationships with parents in order to bridge school and families to provide access to resources while building real relationships. One participant stated, “Then I would say, building true relationships with families. I believe we have too many fake relationships with families currently.” Building relationships have been a strong component that runs throughout the responses given.

Principal Survey Conclusion

The administrators that participated in the survey placed a large emphasis on building relationships with students. Throughout the survey they usually came back to the idea that relationships with students helps when dealing with discipline, families, and school culture. They collectively felt that trauma was prevalent in the schools and that as a school we need to work on learning to deal with the emotional to get to the learning. Similar to the teachers survey, when professional development was present the administration tended to be more aligned in their thinking and when it was not they were less aligned. Seeing how administrators view trauma it is important to see how that translates into their working model of schools through a policy lens.

Data Document Collection

The documents that were examined were Student and Teacher Handbooks from the district and each of the secondary buildings, programs implemented, grading practices, resources available for students, and policies. The researcher used a data collection checklist/notes graph to collect the data (see Appendix C). The researcher was looking for systems that supported a trauma-informed culture in current practices and procedures using the seven pillars; Awareness, Positive Classroom Culture, Intentional Instruction, Restorative Discipline, Linking with Mental Health Professionals, Self-Care, and Professional Development.

Currently, the district's vision is based on the 2006 version from the former superintendent. This is in the revision stages to reflect new goals for the district. The 2006 vision is not focused on SEL or current trauma-informed practices, however,

through the revision process, SEL is one of 4 main strategic priorities for the district. The district's new vision has four strategic priorities; Safe and Healthy Culture, Teaching and Learning, Collaborative Connections, and Innovation and Leadership. The new strategic Priorities puts students' social and emotional needs at the center of their education (See Appendix G).

The researcher, using the checklist, dissected each secondary school's student handbook using a trauma-informed lens for understanding. The checklist outlined three of the key instructional practices to hold next to the student handbook as a way to establish if trauma-informed practices are present. The three key practices used in the student handbooks were Restorative practices, Intentional Instruction, and Positive Classroom Culture. An overall observation throughout all of the documents dissected is that the language is seeped in education language and hidden among policy which would make it difficult to understand unless you are in the education environment. Therefore, it is not clear or concise and displays more punitive language versus restorative practices.

An example in the 2019 High School Student Handbook is the Attendance Policy. It is written in paragraph form and outlined to persuade readers that student attendance is important and that it is policy. The drawback to this is that the handbook outlines the Attendance policy using one thousand six hundred and fifty-eight words and spans over four pages. It outlines student, parent, and teacher expectations around attendance and tardies, however, many students and parents may not understand what the expectation is due to the length and amount of legal language. Within the document, there are moments of clarity when language is defined, for example, the handbook defined tardiness, "A

tardy is defined as being late to class”. Even though this is written in clear language, it is not consistent throughout the document.

Throughout the student handbook, discipline policies are focused on punitive measures for not abiding by the rules and policies. The High School Student Handbook (2019) outlines on a three-page chart all the misbehaviors that might come up and the consequences that would follow (pp. 8-11). The list entails a variety of misbehaviors listed and the consequences for misbehavior using a first, second, and third offense. An example of the chart under misbehavior is bullying, “Bullying: conduct that interferes with a student’s ability to learn and the teacher’s ability to educate students in a safe environment” (p. 8). The first offense has a symbol which means that a student conference and a parent or guardian is notified but could result in suspension or other, a second offense has 1-5 day suspension, and a third offense is “Exclusion, Expulsion, Transfer, Change of placement, Remediation, Discharge” (p. 8). In every misbehavior listed, the consequence is suspension, restriction, expulsion, or law enforcement. These are examples of punitive discipline. The student breaks the rules and the adult chooses the consequence for the infraction. Restorative practices are not present in this current model.

The 2019 Middle School Handbook starts with a mission, “Middle School, in partnership with parents and community, will strive to develop lifelong learners who value themselves and others and are productive in a changing society” (p. 2), however, there are no observable places where parents partner in the discussions on discipline in the learning environment. The focus is more on informing parents of the behavior

problems that arise. The Middle School Handbook (2019) compared to the High School Handbook (2019) has reduced the policy language and is a little more vague in the consequence language although it does not use restorative language. For example, the Middle School Handbook (2019) listed fifteen discipline actions “in an attempt to change or stop the behavior ...” (p. 7). This list ranges from conferences with the teacher, parent, or Principal to suspension, exclusion, and expulsion. Out of the list of fifteen consequences, not one is restorative in nature or focused on restoring the community. Another direct observation was that the language tends to lean towards a punitive lens versus a restorative lens. For example, in the Middle School Handbook (2019) it states under the Rule of Conduct, which lists unacceptable behaviors that can result in disciplinary action Under Rules of Conduct page 5 letter D the heading “Unacceptable, illegal, and incorrigible behavior”, has five statements that use punitive language. The first three statement starts with, “Willful conduct ...” which entails that the students understand and willfully chooses to misbehave. Another example of punitive language versus restorative is in number four of the same list which states, “Violation of any rules of conduct ...” (p. 5). This takes a punitive lens because the violation is against the rules versus the community. Within both student handbooks, there is not a place where the behavior and who is affected need to be restored. There is no responsibility on the parents or students to fix the mistake.

Within the policies, punitive language is present throughout the documents. The areas that punitive language is most used are within the discipline language. It enhances punitive measures such as suspensions and does not reflect restoring the harm done to the

community. Another observation made in the student handbook, policies were not written with ease for families and students. They were written with language steeped in *education speak* and *policy* to communicate rules and regulations. This can make it difficult for families to decipher what the policy is really saying and how that is translated for students during the school day.

Classroom Observations

To understand how staff incorporated trauma-informed practices the researcher visited eight classrooms three separate times each to observe specific classroom routines, classroom climate, and teacher interactions with students that are specific to trauma-informed environments. The focus of the observations was to understand how the teacher is able to implement trauma-informed practices in the classroom setting with students. The observations looked at Teachers Actions, including body language, related to students, and facial expressions. The observations also looked at classroom routines and classroom environments.

Each classroom visit took place in teacher's classrooms with students during a 45 minute period. The observations were focused on the teacher, the classroom structure, and their day to day interactions with students. The observations were compiled using a checklist (see Appendix D) outlining the variety of trauma-informed behaviors. Within the checklist observations, I documented in writing any additional observations during the classroom visit.

The participants that were observed consisted of a:

- 7th-grade History teacher

- 6-8th grade math intervention teacher
- 7th-grade art teacher
- 6th-grade language arts and science teacher
- 7th-grade English teacher
- 11-12th grade global studies/history teacher
- 9-12 Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) teacher
- 9th grade - age 22 math teacher at the Alternative Learning Program (ALP)

Each teacher had different roles within the secondary schools. The participants represented a variety of roles with students. Some content teachers work with a range of 150 - 190 students daily. The specialist, such as EBD, Math Intervention, and ALP teachers, individualize instruction for a small set of students within the school year due to the district's specialized programming.

Teachers actions. The observations revealed some very consistent data across all settings. As I spent time observing in the classrooms, the 8 participating teachers greeted students with a smile, had a pleasant and approachable demeanor, and seemed to have developed positive relationships with their students. The 8 teachers across all settings used a calm demeanor with students even in hectic situations. This was possible through the classroom routines that were established and practiced throughout the school year.

Routines. Another area observed were classroom routines. Students showed a level of understanding of the expectations and routines that the teachers established. Teachers across all 8 settings had transitioned from one activity to another using a strong

classroom structure which created a predictable environment. Each classroom had a beginning, middle, and end wrap-up structure. The beginning usually consisted of learning targets, activities they would work on for the time together, and time for questions. The middle was the learning time, such as lessons, group work, or collaborative learning. The end of the period consisted of the wrap-up usually in the large group. Overall, the classrooms had good transitions from activity to activity and were structured with developmentally appropriate learning routines.

One area that I observed as a distraction to the classroom environment was the disruptions beyond the students, for example, emails and phone calls during instruction time pulled teachers away from the teaching and learning environment. Teachers needed to respond, due to it being about students in their classroom. Another distraction, at the high school level, was that students would walk in late, which seemed to be a normal practice, but was disruptive to the instruction and the students that came on time.

Strong and intentional transitions. The teachers that demonstrated strong and intentional transitions had students focused on the learning and their responsibilities instead of where they needed to be or what they needed to do. Teachers communicated and demonstrated transitions through most modalities, including written, spoken, and demonstration. Students responded well to these transitions. One teacher implemented music into the end of the classroom wrap up. Five minutes before the period ended, music came on and students instantly started to clean up and return to their seat for the teacher to wrap up the lesson. The teacher was not yelling over the students during work time, or having to run around managing the cleanup. It was a normal routine and all

students were aware of what the music signified. The teacher stated that they were able to end the classroom with a clear wrap up due to this routine.

Classroom climate. The classroom climate across the 8 classrooms were positive for students, however, some classrooms had a loose structure when students worked in groups or had work time. Unless addressed, this could communicate a lack of control by the teacher and can feel less safe to a student in trauma.

Level tone and presence. Each teacher seemed to master their tone in the classroom which demonstrated a good command of the learning environment. Teachers demonstrated this through many different strategies that they used during the class period. For example, many teachers used a microphone when they had large class sizes. Microphones give teachers the ability to have an even and calm tone versus yelling over students to get their attention. Another example of a teacher demonstrating an ability to command the classroom with a level tone and presence was a teacher that needed to wrap up the lesson however, remained quiet until everyone was listening. This teacher was able to wait and eventually the students were telling each other to listen in a respectful manner. This teacher used a signal and then quietly waited until everyone was paying attention, this did not take long to accomplish because it was built into the structure of the classroom.

Student voice. Student voice was a part of the culture in classrooms that I observed during the student learning. One teacher at the high school had choices of assignments that demonstrated the objective to the learning and students could choose from the list. A middle school teacher gave students the option of using a gaming style

mode to review for their history test. The students would receive points and compete with others that were using this mode of learning. Others chose to study using notes taken in class. They were all working in the way they chose to work but still learning the benchmarks required of them.

The observations took place in the spring of the school year so many had very established routines and strong relationships with students. Routines were set with teacher guidance yet students felt a part of the classroom culture in establishing the routines. One classroom that I observed students came in, did a variety of jobs with purpose, such as attendance, turning the projector on, and setting the classroom up for learning. Students set the classroom rules at the beginning of the year and you could see that students owned them. There was no observable behavior management on the teachers' part during classroom time. On the flip side, two teachers that did not have a student voice as a part of the culture spent a lot of time managing little behaviors while being observed. For example, when given work time students were off task and the teacher spent the majority of the time getting them on task and managing their behaviors. Another observation was that the classroom volume was loud in these two classrooms compared to the others. Furthermore, the teacher spent a lot of time telling students to quiet down and get to work.

Expectations set. The 6 classrooms that mastered setting expectations had students focused and learning. The teachers had clear routines and expectations that worked for students. Students understood where they were supposed to sit, where they were supposed to focus their attention, and what they needed to do to get their needs met.

Much of the classroom time was focused around learning and not worrying about how to ask to go to the bathroom, get a drink, or find out where the assignments are posted. The 6 classrooms brought setting expectations to a new level. The students understood that during their work time the class routines still applied so students got to work.

Collaborative work time routines. I observed 4 classrooms of teachers that had mastered collaborative work times in the classrooms. They had teacher presence at all times as part of the work time. These classrooms had a more observable engagement and less student anxiety and frustration were observed during independent or group work time. Observations revealed that in these classrooms students attended to the task with more engagement than when this component was absent. Teachers that did this well were a quiet yet very present entity in the working structure. One teacher I observed in this type of classroom was so much a part of the working time that I had to search for them in the sea of students. The teacher was sitting in the groups with students, sitting one on one with them, and working with them. This teacher did not spend the time that students were working to grade, talk to students about missing work, or catch up on emails, they were working side by side with the students in the learning process. This teacher was also a non-threatening presence in this working environment. The teacher did not stand over the students when walking around, instead, they sat next to or stood with the student while talking and engaging. Another factor observed was that these teachers were always focused on learning and not distracting students' from their learning.

Teachers that were observed that did not have this mastered used this time to grade, call students out on missing work, and answer emails. The observations revealed

that there was less engagement during independent or group learning in these classrooms. What was observed during this collaborative work time is that students waited for teachers to swing around and would try to look busy once the teacher was present and start goofing off when the teacher was gone. The intention of walking around was observed as more of a behavior management tool instead of a learning tool. These teachers engaged in more side conversations with groups or individuals, maybe as a way to connect with students, yet the result was further distracting them from the learning. This can be confusing for students and hard to regulate expectations and consistent routines when the teacher falls in and out of their own expectations.

Observation Summary

The observations gave insight into the classrooms from an insider perspective. Observing classrooms gave the researcher insight into some key differences between classroom practices that had good teacher presence, established routines, and a calm classroom environment. This insight and awareness can help staff build skills that can be implemented into the school structure. The conclusion at the end of the observations was that it is important to build good skills for teachers when managing their classroom environment. When working with students with a trauma background it is essential to have intentional classroom structures to create predictable learning environments. As observed, more learning engagement and less off-task behavior was present when the routines were predictable and the teacher was engaged with the students during collaborative time versus managing classroom behavior while students worked. I observed Emotional Behavioral Disabled (EBD) students in these structured classroom

settings, the paraprofessional was able to stand aside because the students worked alongside everyone else. In the 2 classrooms that had less structure and more behavior management the Paraprofessional had to work shoulder to shoulder to keep the students on task. My conclusion is that the more structured, predictable classrooms, students were able to get in a calm state to learn. Next, I was able to conduct a Focus Group with this same group of teachers in order to get deeper insights into their perceptions, understanding, and skills.

Focus Group

The focus group was established using 6 teachers that were also observed in the classrooms. All 8 teachers that were observed were asked to be a part of the focus group, however, 2 of the teachers had coaching obligations and were not able to make it. Conducting a focus group with the teachers that were observed gave a deeper dive into their procedural knowledge and their perceived awareness of trauma-informed classroom practices. The focus group met for a 90-minute session which went over the 70 minutes scheduled due to the participants expanding on the conversation around trauma. Each participant felt this was an important topic that was not given enough attention in schools. The researcher read and coded the transcript looking for emerging themes within the participant's responses. Overall, the participants gave an inside perspective of trauma and trauma-informed schools through their own lens and experiences teaching.

The six participants in the focus group were classroom teachers with various teaching assignments. The two participants that could not participate in the focus group

were one 6th grade Language Arts teacher and one high school Social Studies teacher.

The teachers that participated in the focus group consisted of a:

- 7th-grade History teacher
- 6-8th grade math intervention teacher
- 7th-grade art teacher
- 7th-grade English teacher
- 9-12 Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) teacher
- 9th grade - age 22 math teacher at the Alternative Learning Program (ALP).

The focus group conversation focused on three themes; trauma that impacted students, teachers that work with students in trauma, and the school system as a whole and the support or lack of support available for staff and students. The next section highlights the focus group themes in these three areas that participants highlighted throughout the conversation.

Trauma That Impacted Students

Participants shared their experience working with students and families that struggle in and with the school environment. All participants reported seeing the effects of trauma in their classrooms through student behavior and learning difficulties. One of the concerns that emerged in the data was the increase in social problems among students, especially girls within the middle school setting. Teachers have seen an increase in the ideation of suicide, anxiety, and social problems that they must deal with during the school day on top of the teaching curriculum. Participants also reported a deficit in

skills of self-regulation and coping strategies when faced with difficulties. Teachers felt that the only way through this is to teach students more social-emotional awareness on top of the curriculum.

Teachers Work with Students in Trauma

Teachers reported that when working with students they struggle to get them the help that they need even with the built-in support. Teachers admitted that they felt the support in school was not enough for the needs they are seeing in students even though their counselors and social workers are wonderful working with students. During class, if something comes boiling to the top with students many times they are unable to get a hold of a staff member to support the immediate need. Teachers felt that there was not enough support for students for the amount of students we have in our schools today.

One of the pieces that emerged in the data was the overwhelming need to have places for students to calm down when they need it. A place like this, teachers felt needed to be monitored and yet private enough for students to have time to get calm. One struggle that teachers reported with the idea of a resource room was the push back from content staff feeling that students would use this to get out of class and work.

Schools System of Support for Staff and Students

Teachers reported that at times the systems of support set up felt contrary to what the teachers and students needed. For example, teachers reported that the administration set up a sub to come in and pull students to work on getting them caught up from the massive amounts of late homework. The problem with this was that they were pulling them from classes that made them miss even more instruction time. The teachers reported

that this response was not trauma-informed because they were putting someone in front of them that did not have a relationship with them and did not help them with the missing work. The teachers felt that this was not going to get the job done because if the students could do this without the support they would have already done the work. These examples were contrary to the trauma-informed whole school approach and the teachers did not feel included in these decisions.

Focus Group Conclusion

Three distinct themes emerged from the focus group data. These three themes were centered around the practitioner's perspective as they work with students daily. These three themes were about; trauma that impacted students they work with, teachers that work with students in trauma, and the school systems support or lack of support available for staff and students.

Study Conclusion

At the conclusion of the study, there was an up-close and in-depth look at the transition into a trauma-informed whole school approach through the educators' lens. Through survey, classroom observations, document review, and focus group I gained insight that aided in forming four major learnings. These four major learnings helped form what became important factors to building skills in the transition to trauma-informed whole school approach. These four learnings are outlined within the seven pillars; Quality embedded professional development, restorative practices, increasing mental health professionals, and self-care.

What is Next

In Chapter 5, I will summarize the study and the major learnings from the data collected and analyzed. Through combining the case study I will highlight the connections made from the literature review. Next, I will cover the plan for communicating the results, recommendations for future study, and discuss the limitations of the case study. Finally, I will share my final thoughts.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Trauma-Informed schools have become increasingly more prevalent in conversations today, however, questions still remain whether or not *understanding* trauma turns into actual trauma-informed *practices* within the school environment. Students spend a large amount of their time in schools, structured around learning and relationships, including peer-to-peer and student-to-adult (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Therefore, pairing that time with the current understanding of brain development, neuroplasticity, and learning, schools have the ability to build important connections with students that have trauma histories and intervene to rewire the brain in positive healthy ways. Trauma can become a barrier to learning if we do not intervene (Cole et al., 2013). Crosby (2015) stated, “Schools can play a major role in improving educational outcomes for traumatized students” (p. 223). Further research reveals that not only would there be an increase in learning but a reduction in the current state of mental health issues among students. Healing trauma in children would diminish the risk of the epidemic health issues we are facing today (Felitti et al., 1998). Dye (2018) confirmed, “The psychological disruptions for trauma survivors are severe and can have persistent, chronic long-term effects” (p. 384). In response, organizations have increased policy at the state educational levels (MDE, 2019). For example, the Minnesota Department of Education focused on, Multiple Tiers of Systems of Support (MTSS), anti-bullying laws, graduation rates, discipline policies, and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). These policies have become front and center in 21st-century education. Furthermore,

trauma-informed language has been integrated into school organizations with the goal of creating environments where students feel safe, cared for, and can learn, however, this feels like a fragmented approach to handling trauma in the school setting. Therefore, my focus throughout the literature review and case study was to answer my research questions, What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

What I have learned from the literature review and the case study is that we have made strides in schools and communities to be trauma-informed, however, it is at the beginning stages. Some of the problems education faces are that students in trauma struggle to learn, fail to graduate, and have high-risk behaviors leading to suspensions and other punitive measures of discipline (Craig, 2017). Moreover, current educational funding, school structures, and teacher training can be challenging in making the school change in order to meet the needs of traumatized students (Cole et al., 2013). Another problem is that understanding current research and policy and actually putting it into practice within the school structure can be a significant disconnect in thinking for schools and educators.

Through the literature review, several challenges emerged in the journey to a trauma-informed culture. First, creating a trauma-informed culture is a shift from the current education structure (Cole et al., 2005). As an example, the current structure has staff in place to deal with discipline, nonetheless, our current system and society is much

more knowledgeable on how to use punitive measures instead of trauma-informed restorative measures. Using restorative measures would require training for all staff in a school structure and more support staff in place to engage the process of restorative practices with students, families, and staff when *harm* has been done. In order to carry this out in a school setting, it would require a reallocation of staffing and resources for an additional full-time position to fulfill this role within our current education system. In a rural setting this can be a challenge, currently support staff usually carry out two or more roles within their contracts spreading them thin. Money is not as available to hire these specialized positions. This was evident in the Case study focus group when one of the participants stated, “ Our Social Workers and Counselors should not be doing lunch duty because that is a whole hour we do not have access to them when we need them for students.”

Another challenge to creating a trauma-informed whole school environment is that staff can equally be dealing with their own trauma. If every two out of three students have experienced trauma then every two out of three educators have also experienced trauma (Cole et al., 2005; Perry, 2016). Consequently, having healthy self-regulated adults in front of students can be challenging if educators are reacting to the everyday stressors of the educational environment. Nealy-Oparah and Scruggs-Hussein (2018) stated, “... we must process our own healing of trauma, so that we are not so easily triggered ourselves, re-creating a cycle of triggers that result in a poor cultural-climate of the schools’ community” (p. 12). Therefore, transforming into a trauma-informed

environment would take training, time, and attention on staff to make the changes required.

As I reflected on case study, literature review, and my two questions on participants perceptions, understandings and skills I came to the conclusion that perceptions and understandings are shaped by family, culture, and these experiences are unique to each individual. The challenge school systems face is that we deal with people and not product, therefore, our schools need to have a system in place that support people. As a school culture, we do this through continued professional development, reflection, and personal work on self. The participants in the case study revealed a drive to explore personal biases, beliefs, and actions to continue to be present for all of their students. However, what the study revealed is a need for more skills. Teaching children is an art and participants observed that in order to work with each student they needed more skills that add to their toolbelt. Trauma is a new understanding of participants and how it impacts student behavior and learning. This new understanding has created a need for skills to counter the barriers trauma has on students in their classrooms. The immediate impact that was observed, as the district transitioned to a trauma-informed whole school approach is the shared understanding of trauma and the immediate response participants engaged in. For example, participants made immediate changes to incorporate social and emotional learning into their already tight schedules. They began leaning into student behavior and asking more questions versus reacting. Another transition I observed was the middle school fall conferences. They took an old practice that had the possibility of

intimidating parents and students (a possible trigger) and transition the practice to be more sensitive and less intimidating. ?

To investigate the transitions to a trauma-informed environment, the case study analyzed and coded the transcripts focused on specific themes to emerge within the data. The case study was developed as a way to investigate a rural school district as they transitioned into a trauma-informed environment. The research questions leading the case study was: What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting to incorporate trauma-informed culture centered around research-based instructional practices?

These questions shaped the literature review in Chapter Two. The research in chapter Two was delineated out further and informed the direction of the case study research along with the data collection methods and tools implemented. Through the survey, focus group, document collection, and observations, a deeper understanding of the current school culture and educator's perceptions, understandings, and skills emerged. Chapter Five will present a summary of the current study and the connections to the literature and five major learnings. Next, this chapter will present implications for current practice, followed by a summary of the limitations in the study. Lastly, suggestions for further study will be addressed.

Connections to Literature

The 1998 ACE study revealed a devastating reality that trauma has on our society and more importantly the students that sit in classrooms today (CDC, 2016; Felitti et al.,

1998; Plumb et al., 2016). Trauma disrupts a child's ability to learn, self-regulate, and form positive relationships in school (Craig, 2017). When there is repeated violence and instability at home, students can experience the world as a threatening place and continue to be hypervigilant of perceived dangers. Therefore, the survival center of the brain gets activated. Students that are avoiding danger and pain, are also unable to receive positive messages, perform academically, and behave appropriately (Cole et al., 2005). Hyper and hypo-arousal states affect students' reactions and behavior to the people and circumstances around them, therefore, relationships can be difficult and students are unable to engage in the learning. This reality for students leads to being unsuccessful in a school setting (Cole et al., 2005).

Another important factor in understanding trauma was through advanced studies in neurobiology on the brain and nervous system. These findings revealed that the brain is adaptive or plastic and can forge new pathways (Van Der Kolk, 2014). This important discovery has given us ways to mitigate trauma's impact on children while in a school setting through skills, structure, and knowledge. This discovery serves to alleviate trauma's effect and guide important strategies that form essential trauma-informed best practices. Through combined research (Cole et al., 2019; Craig, 2017; Souers, 2016; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016) a trauma-informed whole school approach emerged that defined what I call the seven pillars all educators need to incorporate in order to make up a trauma-informed environment; Awareness, Positive Classroom Culture, Intentional Instruction, Restorative Discipline, Linking with Mental Health Professionals, Self-Care, and Professional Development. These seven pillars are essential in a school culture for

students in trauma to acquire the learning necessary to be successful. Furthermore, these seven pillars can create a bridge between the learning gap that exists between students dealing with trauma and the students that do not have trauma histories.

The case study design was built around the seven pillars of a trauma-informed environment and helped to inform the currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills when incorporating a trauma-informed school culture. The focus of the study was to answer, What are currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills school staff have while incorporating a trauma-informed school culture? What transitions take place in a traditional rural secondary school setting that embodies trauma-informed school culture centered around the research-based instructional practices?

Major Learnings

The analysis of the case study along with connections made from the literature review has led to four major learnings. The first major learning was the importance of quality ongoing embedded professional development (EPD) as an essential component when transiting to a trauma-informed environment. Evidence of this was apparent in the study. The areas that had been previously covered in professional development, staff was more aligned in their understanding. After reviewing many case studies applying trauma-informed implementations, Phifer and Hull (2016) believed that teachers more often than not were left on their own to figure out how to work with students in trauma. Therefore they believed that “One of the important next steps in the trauma-informed school’s movement is to develop more intensive and sustained professional development opportunities and to assess whether the professional development leads to changes in

educator behavior and decision making” (p. 204). The second major learning was that restorative practices’ are an elusive practice for the secondary staff and has led to many misunderstandings. Therefore, this needs to be clarified and incorporated into EPD. Next, the data revealed the need to increase mental health resources and professionals in the current school structure. Lastly, even though secondary trauma is a danger for staff, educators do not see self-care as a necessary practice within the work they do with traumatized students.

Quality ongoing embedded professional development (EPD). Professional development is essential in the implementation of a trauma-informed whole school approach. In order to gain staff buy-in and ownership to create a unified environment for students dealing with trauma, professional development needs to be at the center. Professional development in a trauma-informed whole school approach should focus on the seven pillars of implementation; Awareness, Positive Classroom Culture, Intentional Instruction, Restorative Discipline, Linking with Mental Health Professionals, Self-Care, and Professional Development.

The three schools that participated in the study had engaged in some introductory trauma-informed professional development. Through professional development, they were introduced to two categories, Awareness and creating a Positive Classroom Culture. The study revealed that in the two topics already covered by professional development, teachers had a stronger knowledge base and were aligned in their understandings and beliefs around both topics. This showed up in the survey data around both topics, Awareness and Positive Classroom Culture. (see Table 2 & 3) The data revealed strongly

agree and agree in the 97% - 100% range across all data sets and 0% in disagree or strongly disagree, revealing that staff was aligned in all areas. Across the literature review on trauma-informed schools, there was an emphasis placed on the need for professional development. Craig (2017) stated that “Trauma-specific training is a key component of building capacity of teachers to work with traumatized students” (p. 101). Furthermore, looking at the data sets it revealed that in the areas covered in professional development, teachers reported a better understanding and had more confidence when talking about those topics. Further evidence of the effectiveness of embedded professional development in a trauma-informed environment was looking at topics that were not addressed in EPD, for example, restorative practices. In the beginning stages of transition, professional development did not yet include restorative discipline. This resulted in a lack of consensus that showed in the data sets. For example, 65 participants that engaged in the survey answered with a wide range of strongly agree to the opposite, strongly disagree, and all options in between, showing a lack of consensus in the participants. Further evidence of this was in the open-ended questions about restorative practice. The staff responses were not aligned and confirmed this with a wide gap of responses, furthermore, staff reported a lack of confidence in understanding restorative practices. Additionally, when asked what professional development was needed, training on restorative practice was the highest at 46 participants or 71% (see Figure 7).

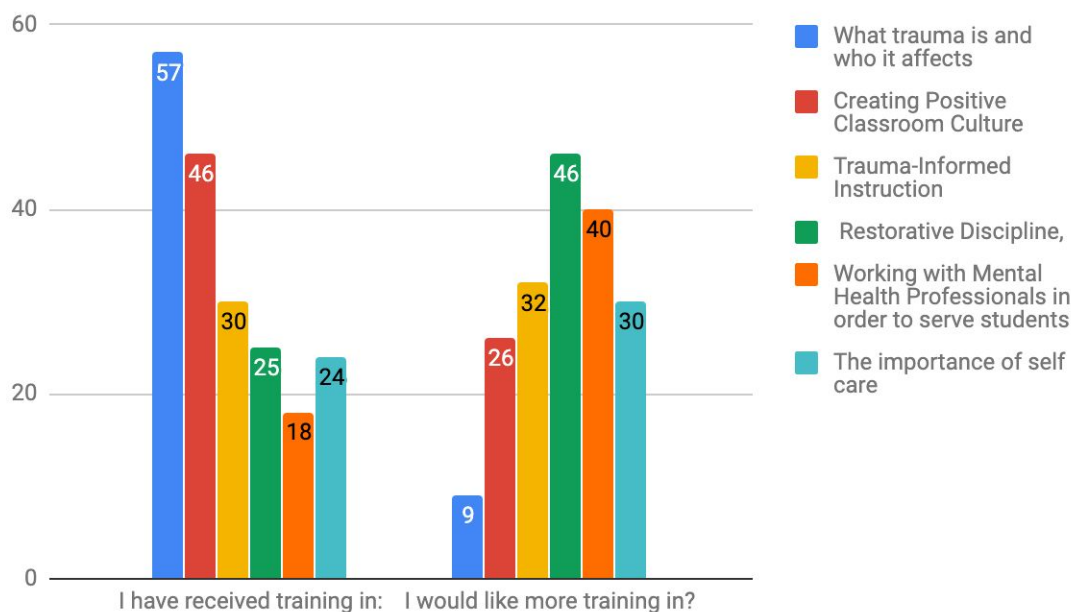


Figure 7: Professional Development

Although I believe that embedded professional development did have a greater impact on staff's aligned understanding of Awareness and Positive Classroom Culture, I could not ignore the results on self-care. In professional development at the middle school, sessions always ended with the importance of self-care when working with traumatized students or high needs students. The professional development of self-care in the middle school did not seem to change the outcome of their responses. In fact, they had similar responses to the high school that did not focus on self-care in their EPD. However, the differences in the middle school teachers' responses in the open-ended questions about 85% started their statements with "I know it is important but ..."

However, it is unclear whether or not professional development impacted this qualifying statement in the data set.

Another important key to embedded professional development in a trauma-informed environment is, quality matters. The survey results revealed that teachers understood the need for a shared understanding but were frustrated by a lack of tools to apply strategies in the classroom and school setting. In this case, the professional development provided at the high school was from an outside source and by someone who has not been in a school setting or had classroom experience. The staff reported that the EPD was engaging but struggled to see the application when working in their setting. This seemed to impact how the training was received.

The teachers reported in an open-ended question that a lack of application forced them to rely on their own experiences to shape how they work and deal with students in trauma and felt this was adequate. The flaw in this model of understanding is that we run the risk of making assumptions about one student's background being similar to the educator's own experience. Even though some educators may have experienced trauma we are assuming the skills and tools are there to deal with students in trauma. The data revealed that most educators have had families that were involved and cared about their education. This was evident in the survey results when 52 or 80% of the teachers reported having a large focus on education as a child and 51 or 78% of the participants reported having a strong parent involvement in their education during their school-age years. This is counter to the data on trauma. The Educators who participated in the survey may have in tune and attentive parents that most likely formed secure attachments between parent and child, which would lead to the feelings of trust towards the adults in their lives. Having supportive adults in life can create resilience to overcome obstacles or work

through healthy stress. A student who has not formed that secure attachment may struggle to trust adults. Furthermore, if a student's hyperarousal state is already out of the window of tolerance due to stressful day or home environment, teachers handling them in the same way as a student who is not hyper-aroused and trusts adults will not get the same result. A simple correction or command from an adult can feel threatening to an already traumatized student (Jennings, 2019). Most children that have been traumatized especially from adult caregivers do not work from the same set of secure attachments that children who have secure adults in their lives. Without the skills to spot and respond to students who have experienced trauma can lead to exacerbate the situation and create frustration for both educator and student, running the risk of re-traumatizing the student.

The focus group, survey, data collection, and observations showed the importance of professional development when transitioning into a trauma-informed environment. Staff continued to reference how they were able to apply new skills when working with students due to the workshop information. Counter to that, the high school teachers reported frustration when skills and tools were not provided during professional development. Therefore, it became evident that the type of professional development matters when working with educators, especially with the limited number of EPD days. Ultimately, professional development needs to help educators align their understanding of trauma and should also include skills and tools that can be applied in their daily interactions with students.

Another major learning was focused on one of the seven pillars of trauma-informed whole school approach, restorative practices. Approaching discipline

across the school setting needs to be consistent across all settings. The study focused on staff perceptions, understanding, and skills while taking a closer look at school policies and rules that govern the day to day interactions.

Restorative practices. The importance of using restorative practices with students became evident within the literature review. Focusing on community built the constructs of restorative practices leading to the understanding that when harm is done to the community it needs to be restored. The data revealed that three areas needed to be considered in a restorative practice model. First, teachers need to buy in and be trained. Secondly, policy needs to be clear to the students, families, and school as to what the norms are for the school environment. Lastly, students need to be held accountable and stay in school at the same time.

The teacher survey revealed that educators struggled with what restorative practices were and how it can help them in the school environment. Considering we are a punitive society this transition can be a hard concept and leads to misinterpretation around accountability. However, It is essential that educators buy-in to these practices in and out of their classrooms. The buy-in is essential when in a school system. If a teacher sends a student out to the office because of a major disruption and feels there is no follow-through from the office, frustration, and trust are compromised. This showed in the data, for example, two participants in the focus group shared that they did not know if the office even dealt with students when they sent them out, their perception was that there was no follow-through. The office just sent them back like it was no big deal. Another participant jumped in and stated, “I do not even send students anymore”, stating,

“it is not worth it”. Creating buy-in and strong communication between office and teachers is essential to making the practice effective. If educators do not feel supported when students act out it can lead to that educator feeling isolated and on their own to deal with big problems and possibly lead to secondary trauma. Furthermore, EPD needs to focus on building tools and skills around restorative practices with educators for the classroom setting and daily interactions with students, therefore, preventing sending students out to be managed by the office staff. The research data revealed that three-fourths of the focus group felt that if they create a predictable environment through creating calm spaces for students they can keep them in a state of learning (Cole et al., 2005). Through buy-in and training, teachers can start to make positive advancements toward restorative practices.

In a trauma-informed school, it is an important factor to instill a restorative practice approach. This approach starts by creating clear expectations. Therefore, it was essential to look at the policies in place that direct discipline decisions. Through the document review the data was clear that the policy from the high school, middle school, and ALP student handbooks were meant more for lawyers and schools than they were for students and their families. The documents are marred with lawyer language and buried in a sea of words. In most cases, it was unclear what the expectation really was. Unclear expectations and rules create an unpredictable environment which may lead to a power struggle within a punitive structure. Students that have a trauma background need to have a predictable environment in which they feel safe and can let their guard down in order to stay in their “upstairs brain” (Dods, 2013; Souers & Hall, 2016). Policy needs to give a

clear understanding of the cultural norms required in the school so everyone is playing from the same expectations.

Lastly, students need to be held accountable and stay in school at the same time. Through further document reviews, the study revealed that current policy at all three school settings focused primarily on punitive measures with students. The student handbooks from the middle and high school demonstrated a punitive, deficit-lens approach that did not empower students to amend their behavior when they acted out (Jennings, 2019). The methods of crime and punishment focused on banishment and isolation. The data from the high school handbook revealed a list of offenses and a list of consequences for offense 1, offense 2, and Offense 3. For all the behaviors on the list, 100% of them had the consequences of suspension. If suspension was not enough for some offenses expulsion, and or secondary placement was next. Educators, through the study, indicated that students who were sent home or in-school suspension because of a punishment did not usually change the behavior when the student returned. The focus group participants shared frustrations when students were suspended for three or four days at a time, stating that there was usually no accountability to homework, or being responsible for what they did. Some stated, "... they use it as a vacation and it becomes more work for me when they come back." The policy governing behavior was punitive in nature and did not have any restoring aspects other than self-reflection.

Restorative practices are contrary to punitive forms of punishment. The students would stay in the school community, attend to their responsibilities, and work on actions to repair the wrong (Craig, 2016). Learning to respond to conflict appropriately and

empathize with others is a healthier model for students that have had trauma. This helps to forge new internal working model for the students and leads to a path of healing within the confines of a safe environment (Jennings, 2019). Craig (2017) stated that restoring relationships makes important changes to the neural development they, "... foster empathy and perspective-taking while gently challenging preconceived notions that peers have of one another" (p. 25). The connections made with students and the more empathy and perspective-taking that students can practice help to heal the negative effects of trauma. With a focus on restorative practices, the student can be in control and still be held accountable for their actions.

District and school policy that is meant to communicate to parents and students should be clear and concise and not meant to be up for interpretation, especially when there are consequences tied to them. Students and families that have trauma backgrounds need to have clear and consistent expectations (Craig, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2016). When districts are not clear, it breaks the trust with students and families.

The next major learning was the increased need for more mental health resources, not only for students but for educators as well. Trauma and secondary trauma are felt throughout the educational system and can diminish the quality of education students are receiving, therefore, this lack of resource needs to be addressed in a trauma-sensitive whole school environment.

Increase mental health resources. The focus group and survey outlined educators expressed beliefs on the need for more mental health support. Across the data sets, there was a consensus on increasing mental health resources in the school setting to

help the larger number of students that need help. Furthermore, educators expressed that it was important to have a resource, to gain vital information on a student's mental health to meet their needs in the school culture. Educators expressed having good social workers and counselors but not enough of them for the amount of students that need help. There were two reasons educators expressed that this was important. The first reason was because of the increase in mental health issues among students and the lack of immediate support when a student or a teacher needs help with a situation. Secondly, educators expressed a need for more of a teamwork approach to each student so they are able to make learning decisions for each student. This aligns with the research, creating a teamwork approach between mental health professionals and educators (Cole et. al., 2005). This teamwork approach gives educators a resource to work with students in a more immediate way, process situations when they arise, learn skills to self-regulate, and give students and families resources that they need. Furthermore, mental health resources will aid in cutting down the number of students that are getting misdiagnosed, wasting years of working with students in the wrong way and as a by-product, not getting the educational gains they deserve.

The first expressed reason was the need to increase mental health professionals because of the increase of mental health issues educators were seeing. Educators felt an incredible lack of support when they needed help with a student due to the amount of workload each social worker and counselor currently have. The amount of need was high and the amount of support was low due to lack of staff availability, time, and family resources. Teachers expressed feeling a lack of support when or if they needed someone

to step in and help with students. The educators expressed that the current support was effective, however, the support teams cannot keep up with the demands and are overworked and spread too thin. Teachers in the survey and focus group expressed a lack of skills to deal with major mental health issues, such as suicide and suicide ideation, anxiety, PTSD, and many others. They expressed across the data set an overwhelmed feeling and lack of skills.

Secondly, educators expressed a need for more of a teamwork approach to each student. When students are getting outside help, teachers perceived that they were the last to know anything about the student that was sitting in their classroom. They felt being made aware of the issues would help them to be better at educating them. Furthermore, they would be able to avoid any potential triggers, understand the workload they can handle, and learn to work with families better.

Linking with mental health professionals is a large piece of trauma-informed schools and aligns with the educators expressed need for support in the work they do with students. This can be a good partnership if it is set up right and within the bounds of confidentiality. Cole et al. (2005) stated that mental health professionals, “can offer many kinds of assistance to schools that are helping traumatized children learn” (p. 58). In a teamwork approach, teachers could process student needs with other teachers as well as a mental health professional who has expertise in trauma (Cole et al., 2005). Cole et al., (2013) also stated having a mental health professional as a resource could be a support for the teachers when they need to process difficult cases and their responses to them. A mental health professional can become a resource in two ways, first, they can give

clinical supports for school staff and secondly, they can access mental health resources for families and students (Cole et al., 2005; Nealy-Oparah & Scruggs-Hussein, 2018).

Educational systems need to be aware of the importance of this last major learning, self-care. Self-care seems to lend itself in an educators mind as being selfish and or optional, however, the literature revealed and the data confirmed that it is vital to have a focus on your own self-care for the ability to stay grounded, consistent, and regulated in the face of trauma and trauma responses.

Self-care. One of the concerns that surfaced as the data was analyzed was educators' belief on self-care. The staff reported that they felt it was important, however, admitted that they do not take time for it. As the district moves to a more trauma-informed whole school approach, it is vital that self-care becomes the most important aspect of this process. Sourers and Hall (2016) said it well, "If we aren't physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy, we cannot reasonably expect to be able to help our students become healthier and more successful in school" (p. 40). Self-care, on a personal level, shows an aspect of a healthy well-regulated adult. However, when you are working with vulnerable groups it is even more vital that good mental health routines are part of your normal every day. Perry (2014) stresses that "All professionals working with traumatized children can learn approaches and strategies to protect themselves from being emotionally overwhelmed by this work" (p. 2). The concern is that when we do not implement strategies to take care of ourselves we are more likely to be stressed and exhausted which in turn affects the students we work with.

Secondary stress is a real and present factor for educators. When experiencing secondary stress you can become agitated, anxious, sleep less, worry more, ruminate on worries, and engage less in fun activities (NCTSN, 2019). Crosby (2015) stated that “School personnel have a front-row seat to the behavioral, academic, and socioemotional issues that traumatized students encounter” (p. 228). These issues can be taxing and if educators are not taking care of themselves they are opening themselves up to the possibility of secondary stress.

Secondary stress opens teachers up to many different issues. Craig (2017) defined secondary stress or compassion fatigue characterized by “feelings of incompetence and emotional exhaustion” (p. 100). This feeling can lead to feelings of struggling to maintain a level of emotional detachment towards difficult students, struggling with overloaded work schedules leading to burnout, struggling with a mismatch of skills and performance expectations, and struggling with helpless feelings when trying to give students what they need. These feelings can lead to escape activities, such as, chronic overeating and or drugs and alcohol to numb (Craig, 2016). Aguliar (2018) commented on educators need to stop being martyrs about self-care and approach it with a different mindset then not having time, “... the time you put into yourself will reward you with productivity, efficiency, and emotional well being. Without attending to the underlying physical causes of stress, you’ll find it harder to bounce back” (p. 170). The reality is, all educators should understand the importance of maintaining a healthy self-care routine while working with students with trauma backgrounds.

As I reflect on the five major learnings and answer my research questions, I believe that teachers are on the right track to making the transition to a trauma-informed whole school approach. Many insights in the case study addressed the areas that teachers in the district struggled with, such as, restorative practices, linking mental health professionals to the school environment, self-care routines. The work going forward is to continue to do quality professional development and engage educators in the change towards trauma-informed schools in all of the seven pillars; Awareness, Positive Classroom Culture, Intentional Instruction, Restorative Discipline, Linking with Mental Health Professionals, Self-Care, and Professional Development.

Communicating the findings

Understanding trauma and the devastating effects of trauma on our social systems, students, and student learning pushes our society forward in this work. Although, I believe that we are still at the beginning stages of implementation across the United States. Having an in-depth look at the beginning stages of implementation in practice creates a chance for the voices of educators to be heard and recognized through the implementation process. Educators are present with students daily, developing relationships with the students and families, and leading classrooms. Communicating the results of this study helps to communicate their needs to others.

The first step is to communicate the results of the current findings to the participating district. Moreover, looking at the larger context of education, it is important to communicate results to districts working towards implementing a trauma-informed whole school approach. Also, communicating results at the state-wide educational

organizations, such as MDE. The benefit would be to impact policy that helps the school systems and mental health concerns among children.

The work that can have the largest, immediate impact is to share the results with the current district and continue on in the work towards a trauma-informed whole school approach. My recommendations would be to communicate the results to the school board, administration team, and then all other school personnel. The school personnel should include all educators, paraprofessionals, custodians, kitchen staff, secretaries, and parent involvement committees. Next, create and deliver quality EPD around continued efforts to build aligned perceptions, understanding, and skills of trauma that build trauma-informed whole school approach practices. Furthermore, the recommendation would be to build inquiry teams to research, plan, implement, and monitor the progress as the district is transitioning into a trauma-informed whole school approach. (Cole et al., 2013)

From a larger context of education, communicating the results would help other districts to begin the process of implementing a trauma-informed whole school approach. The results can help guide them through the key instructional practices and evaluate their current staff's current perceptions, understanding, and skills as they begin the process.

It is important to continue to enlist our state agencies in educational research that reflects current practice, especially as they make policies that impact educational resources and time. When state agencies, such as MDE create policy an extreme amount of resources are allocated at the district level to be compliant. Educational research needs to continue to be front and center to these decisions so that the health and wellness of our

schools are not compromised by taking time, attention, and resources away from trauma-informed whole-school approaches. The continued steps would always be working between research and application in order to inform education.

Implications for Current Practice

Conducting a case study served in the interpretation of educators currently held perceptions, understandings, and skills as the district transitions into a trauma-informed whole school approach. To create a trauma-informed whole school approach, every aspect of the school environment needs to be working towards the same goal. Due to a lack of research on implementation, it occurred to me that it this case study can be a starting point of implementing a trauma-informed whole school approach at the school and classroom level. Massachusetts has led the way on incorporating trauma-sensitive schools, however, recently released data on their implementation efforts in 2019. There are three distinct implications in our current practice. First, this study can be a jumping-off point for my current district as they go forward in the transition to a trauma-sensitive culture. Secondly, this could be the beginning of a push to see this work at the university level in all teacher training programs. Lastly, this can inform policy on whole-school approaches rather than isolated initiatives.

This data will be useful as my current district goes further in its effort towards creating a trauma-sensitive whole school approach. Looking at the areas that emerged within the data, such as, professional development, restorative discipline, linking with mental health professionals, and self-care, schools can continue to address these topics from a trauma-informed lens.

Implications in the larger context is the impact at the university level. My hope and desire is that we establish trauma-informed training within our teacher training programs at the university level. Currently, we expect that student teaching is going to prepare teachers to deal with the human complexities of trauma and the reality is that teachers are entering into the field unprepared to deal with the social systems. Due to this, teachers are leaving the profession as fast as they are entering (Jennings, 2019). At the university level, the work is to assess what is already being done and adding additional materials to existing courses that address trauma or create stand-alone classes that address the complexities trauma has on the learning. Courses could range from the health, body and brain aspects of trauma and how it impacts learning. Additionally, a course could be created on understanding different types of trauma, such as racial trauma and developmental trauma. Lastly, all courses can be built on self-reflection specific to different scenarios around trauma and how teachers can impact students and the environment. Reflective practice embedded into all education courses can help new teachers gain insight into themselves, such as bias, positionality, ego, social-emotional skills, and trauma histories before they are able to deal with students' trauma.

The last implication is the push on trauma-informed policy from a holistic approach both at the state and local level. Currently, separate policies get brought forth that deal with aspects of trauma-informed best practices, however, they are small pieces and will not make true impact unless it is seen from a holistic view (Cole et al., 2013). Trauma-informed whole school approach is successful when everyone is involved in the lives of the students. Therefore, training staff, and creating a positive school culture are at

the forefront of trauma-informed work. Policy should allow districts to create their own trauma-informed plans using inquiry-based approaches that are responsive to their student's and families' needs (Cole et al., 2013). Also, funding should be provided to enhance the number of mental health professionals and resources to provide quality embedded professional development.

Recommendations for Future Study

Trauma-informed is becoming a buzz word, however, as I researched trauma there have been new developments in the last 10 years. Our understanding of trauma has deeper implications on our society than we previously realized. Through my research, I realized a limited amount of studies that show how trauma-informed practices are applied at the practitioner level. My recommendation would be to create a study with a larger data pool and a longer duration of the implementation stages for both urban and rural districts.

Another recommendation would be to look deeper at the systematic changes of trauma-informed, such as policy, funding, calendar year, and staffing. The questions we need to ask ourselves, does our current educational structure work anymore? We need to dive deep into our current system and how we approach education. We have a lot of students that are home during the summer with little resources. Can we structure our calendar differently? Taking a look at how many hours students attend school, resources available, the sit and get structure to the day, student/teacher ratio (especially in secondary schools) could there be a different approach. Investigating education on a larger systematic vantage point can give society a new look at what is possible in

education today; what needs to change, what needs to stay, and what impact would changing our school system have on our culture and our students well being?

The last recommendation would be to create a study that would produce an evaluation system of current school-wide programming that would help to inform teams as they go through the transition process to trauma-informed whole school approach. Creating a system to evaluate the current school model to make recommendations and changes as the school shifts to trauma-informed. The benefit could reach all-district and can be more responsive to students and family needs for each district moving through the implementation process in the future. Furthermore, creating an evaluation system can create fidelity within the process.

Limitations

Beginning a research study, there is intention to keep bias out, however, as a researcher, I know that I am limited by my experiences and perspectives that make up my internal working models. Therefore, the research has limitations.

The first limitation that became evident was the scale on the survey. The survey was done using a 5 point Likert scale which gives a selection of *neutral* to all the questions required of the participants. Unfortunately, I struggled to decipher what *neutral* meant to the participants without a follow-up question, which was not provided. This limited the research when analyzing the data due to the ambiguity of *neutral*. Neutral leaves the researcher without a clear reason or understanding of the participants thinking behind the concepts being targeted. When I piloted the survey with 5 participants, not

represented in the data set in Chapter Four, not one of them chose neutral. This limitation did not become evident until I implemented and analyzed the data in a larger context.

Another clear limitation was in the selection of participants in the observations and focus groups. I asked several participants that had a variety of viewpoints on trauma with the goal to get counter views represented in this study however, the participants that said yes had similar views around trauma. They all believed that trauma was real and present in our education system and had a deep desire to do something about it. Overall, the educators that participated are considered in the top tier of the profession. These educators are the ones that others go to for help in their profession, they lead in lots of initiatives outside the scope of their role, and they are passionate about always growing. Therefore, I was missing that counter perspective, in my focus group and observation study.

Final Thoughts

As I started my doctoral journey I never imagined that I would do my dissertation study on trauma. Actually, I even went out of my way to avoid it altogether, which only created more work for me in the long run. As I forged ahead in my teaching career I felt like I left that traumatized kid behind. The truth is you never leave it behind. It is always a part of you and is represented in the decisions you make, either by avoiding that part of yourself or giving you purpose. As I entered my doctoral program, I was introduced to ACEs for the first time and I scored a 7 out of 10. Further examination of the statistics on adult health and wellness of ACE children that score 3 or more became front and center in my own life. In 2015, as I entered the doctoral program, I was diagnosed with Multiple

Sclerosis (MS). In tandem of my educational journey to becoming a researcher and scholar, I was dealing with the reality of what trauma meant in my own life front and center. I believe that my avoidance of the topic stemmed from the exposure and vulnerability of revealing the impact that my own childhood had on my life. Yet, I knew education freed me from the constraints of fixed thinking and infused the passion and purpose I feel so deeply as an educator to meet the needs of all students. As a student, the transformation of being freed from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset empowered me to claim the personal power that has always lived inside of me, that as a child of trauma I was so unaware of. As Dweck (2016) stated, “Change can be tough, but I haven’t heard anyone say that it wasn’t worth it. ... and when we bump up against obstacles, you can turn into it” (p. 264). We need to *turn into* what impact trauma is having on our society and our students. The change can only begin when we work towards building school systems that support and empower every student.

Coming to the end of my dissertation I realize that I was always meant to engage in this topic, so choosing to face exposure and vulnerability became small compared to the impact this work can have on the students that sit in our classrooms today and on society as a whole. It is vital to continue to shine a light on the things that lurk in the shadows, only then can we see and understand actions we must take.

I entered into education so that I could have an impact on students. I knew at the beginning of my undergrad that the biggest impact I could have on student learning was to work with teachers. Teachers can make or break a student's perception of themselves as a learner. When teachers have a lack of understanding on how to help a student that is in

trauma, they most likely will give the student a negative view of themselves to carry into the rest of their lives. This was my experience as a student and a learner. Coming from a trauma background, engaging in the learning when I was hypervigilant, spaced out, and not on task, made learning extremely difficult. From my perspective as a child, teachers were scary, school tasks were not important, and if I remained quiet and small I could get away with nobody noticing me. Of course, I have come a long way from that point in my life, however, I will never forget what it felt like to be in a system that did not take notice to how students were feeling. Looking back from my adult perspective, I imagine what I could have been in school if only we had an understanding of trauma as we do today.

With the research on neurobiology, developmental trauma, and trauma-informed care, we are equipped with more tools and skills to help students today than ever before. My experience working in an intervention model always made me wonder what was getting in the way of learning for some of my students. Through understanding trauma, I have gained insight into how learning can become secondary to survival. As teachers, we now have resources on ways to help students go from surviving to thriving if we set the environment to do so. We are more equipped today to help students get into their learning brain through setting predictable, safe, and responsive learning environments. Working with traumatized students can be a lot of work emotionally, therefore, the more tools we have as educators, the more equipped we are at helping students thrive. Going forward as a researcher, teacher, leader, and scholar, it is my goal to continue to explore topics that may not be comfortable but are necessary in the health of our future generations.

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Appendix A

Felitti et al., 1998 Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire **Finding your ACE Score**

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often ...**
Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?
or
Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often ...**
Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?
or
Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you **ever...**
Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
or
Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
4. Did you **often** feel that ...
No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?
or
Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
5. Did you **often** feel that ...
You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?
or
Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
6. Were your parents **ever** separated or divorced?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
7. Was your mother or stepmother:
Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?
or
Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?
or
Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
10. Did a household member go to prison?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

Now add up your "Yes" answers: _____ This is your ACE Score

Appendix B

Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey

Trauma-Informed

* Required

Information on Survey

This study was created for the completion of a doctoral study through Hamline University, Saint Paul, Minnesota. Furthermore, this survey was created in order to gain an understanding of trauma and trauma-informed instruction from a teachers perspective. The survey settings are set so they will not be tracking any personal information. This means your answers will be confidential. The survey is divided into nine sections: general information, awareness, classroom culture, skills and instruction, restorative discipline, self-care, and professional development. For general understanding on classroom practice each statement is an aggregate of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. At the end of each section there is a question that asks for specific examples and descriptions of real world application. Please be aware that some of these may be pulled for written and oral descriptions. When answering the open ended questions please be specific, but also answer in a way that you would be comfortable having shared widely. This survey should take about 25 minutes to complete.

Thanks so much for adding to the greater study in trauma-informed instruction.

Instructions

Please read the questions and select "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree", "Strongly Disagree" that best describes your practice. Each section ends with a question that is a reflection of your views. Please give specific examples if possible. At the end of the survey please press submit. You know that the survey was submitted when you get the "Thank-You" message.

1. Are you willing to participate in this study? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes *Skip to question 2.*
- ☐ No *Stop filling out this form.*

General Information

2. What school do you primarily teach in? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Middle School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ ALP

3. What is the grade level(s) of the students you teach? (check all that apply) **Check all that apply.*☐ Grade 6☐ Grade 7☐ Grade 8☐ Grade 9☐ Grade 10☐ Grade 11☐ Grade 12☐ Other: _____**4. How many years have you been teaching? ****Mark only one oval.*☐ 1-3☐ 4-5☐ 6-10☐ 11-15☐ 16-20☐ 20-25☐ 26-Up**5. What is your highest educational level? ****Mark only one oval.*☐ Undergrad☐ Masters☐ Masters + 15☐ Masters + 30☐ Doctorate**6. Would you say that your understanding of trauma is ... ****Check all that apply.*☐ Excellent☐ Proficient☐ Not Proficient

7. Why did you decide to go into education as a profession?

8. Education was a large focus in my family when I was a student? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

9. My parents/guardians were very involved in my school success? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Awareness:

10. I believe trauma is real and present in our schools today? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. I believe, trauma impacts a student's ability to learn. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

12. I believe trauma impacts a student's ability to trust adults and form healthy relationships with peers. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

13. I believe trauma has direct correlation to student success in the school environment. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

14. I believe trauma impacts the development of a child's brain and therefore, impacts relationships, behavior, and learning. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

15. I believe teaching social and emotional skills in the school environment is important so students can develop healthy ways to deal with conflict? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

16. I believe that teachers need to help build positive adult-student relationships because it is important to the repairing some of the effects trauma has on a student. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

17. Through your experience, what is the most important aspect of working with students and why?

Classroom Culture:

18. I think that teaching students Social Emotional Skills will impact a student's behavior in a positive way. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

19. I believe it is important to teach social emotional skills to students within the classroom and school environment. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

20. **I believe that the choices I make in my classroom (discipline, structure, behavior) can have a direct impact on how a student behaves and learns? ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

21. **I believe that it is important to communicate classroom expectations in a clear, concise, and positive way. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

22. **I believe that goals for achievement should be consistently communicated for students. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

23. **My classroom contains predictable routines that are attentive to transitions and sensory needs of all my students. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

24. I believe that students are more likely to perform better in classrooms where they trust the teacher and feel safe in the classroom environment. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

25. How do you incorporate a positive classroom culture with your students and what are some of the challenges you face each year? (For example, teaching social emotional skills and strategies, student and peer relationships, home environment, etc.)

Skills and Instruction:

26. I feel equipped with the skills to work with students that have a trauma background. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

27. I am able to recognise a student that is in a hypervigilant state *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

28. **I am familiar with accommodations I can make in the classroom to bring a student back to a regulated state of learning. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

29. **I structure classroom activities in a predictable and emotionally safe way for my students. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

30. **In my classroom, opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotions and modulation of behaviors in the classroom. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

31. **I create my classroom so students have a safe place to calm down and or gather themselves if needed in order to practice self-regulation. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

32. **I set my instruction so that information is presented and learning is assessed using multiple modes. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

33. **Through lessons and classroom structure, opportunities exist for students to learn how to interact effectively with others. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

34. **Through lessons and classroom structures, opportunities exist for students to learn how to plan and follow through on assignments. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

35. **When working with students, I try to consider the role that trauma may be playing in learning difficulties at school and give extra support when needed. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

36. Through awareness, trauma-informed schools train and equip teachers with tools to recognize when students need support and how to provide that support. Describe the training or skills you have gained that has helped you work with struggling students in your classroom and socially with you as their teacher or their peers.

37. As a classroom teacher, what do you feel is a challenge when working with the student that struggle?

Discipline

38. I understand restorative discipline practices versus punitive discipline practices. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

39. Students' strengths and interests are encouraged and incorporated into my classroom. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

40. **When a student acts out, I understand what support I can give the student in order to keep them in the classroom and support their learning. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

41. **Opportunities exist for confidential discussion with students on academic success and performance. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

42. **With the understanding of trauma, my classroom discipline policies balance accountability to bring more restorative practices. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

43. **I believe that suspensions are a good practice. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

44. **What is your experience on restorative discipline practices and has this been effective in your practice?**

Linking with Mental Health Professionals

45. I am familiar with all of the resources available in our district to help our students in trauma. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

46. In my experience, support for staff is available on a regular basis, including supervision and/or consultation with a trauma expert, classroom observations, and opportunities for team work. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

47. In my experience, strategies to involve parents are tailored to meet individual family needs, and include flexibility in selecting times and places for meetings, availability of interpreters, and translated materials. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

48. When working with families, all communications respect the bounds of confidentiality. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

49. **Staff has regular opportunities for assistance from mental health providers in responding appropriately and confidentially to the students and families I work with. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

50. **The students and families that we work with have a variety of needs. What resources do you feel schools need to help teachers get the support when working with students and families?**

Self-Care

51. **When I am working with students I incorporate a consistent self-care routine in order to unwind and destress after a difficult day. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

52. **As a teacher I have a hard time letting student problems or struggles go and many times take it home with me. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

53. **More times than not, I feel agitated and annoyed at the things that go on during the school day. (Examples may be, student behavior, other teachers, schedules, decisions out of your control, etc.) ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

54. **Most nights I sleep well and do not worry about my job or students until I am back at work the next day. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

55. **How do you feel about self-care as a necessary practice in teaching and what does that look like in your life?**

Professional Development:

56. **To continue learning about trauma and trauma-informed practices I believe that some type of ongoing professional development opportunities should be available? ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

57. **Personal reflection on teaching practices and personal beliefs are essential to explore in order to help my work with all students. ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

58. **When looking ahead to the needs of the students and families you serve, what professional development do you believe is the most essential and why?**

59. **How many hours of trauma training have you received? (including Continuing Education credits) ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-20
- ☐ 20+

60. **I have received training in: ***

Check all that apply.

- ☐ What trauma is and who it effects
- ☐ Creating Positive Classroom Culture
- ☐ Trauma-Informed Instruction
- ☐ Restorative Discipline
- ☐ Working with Mental Health Professionals in order to serve students
- ☐ The importance of Self-Care
- ☐ Other: _____

61. I would like more training in? **Check all that apply.*

- ☐ What trauma is and who it effects
 - ☐ Creating Positive Classroom Culture
 - ☐ Trauma-Informed Instruction
 - ☐ Restorative Discipline
 - ☐ Working with Mental Health Professionals in order to serve students
 - ☐ The importance of Self-Care
 - ☐ Other: _____
-

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Appendix C

Data Document Collection:

Data Document Collection:	Middle School	High School	ALP	District
Student Handbook:				
Restorative Discipline, Intentional Instruction, Positive Classroom Culture				
	Notes	Notes	Notes	Notes
Restorative Practices:				
Discipline procedures				
School rules and culture				
Expectations for classroom environment				
Student policy on Classroom discipline				
Teacher Handbook:				
Restorative Discipline, Intentional Instruction, Positive Classroom Culture				
	Notes	Notes	Notes	Notes
Restorative Practices:				
Discipline procedures				
School rules and culture				
Expectations for classroom environment				
Teacher policy on Classroom discipline				
Social & Emotional Learning				
Awareness, Linking with Mental Health Professionals				
	Notes	Notes	Notes	Notes
Social emotional learning				
teaching students social emotional skills and strategies				
Trauma-sensitive instruction (Culturally Responsive)				
Mental health support				
Response to Intervention				
	Notes	Notes	Notes	Notes
Student connection				
Family connection				
Learning				
School Success				
School Culture				
Positive Classroom Culture, Self-Care, Professional Development				
	Notes	Notes	Notes	Notes
Systems in place that promote positive school culture for students				
Systems in place that promote positive school culture for teachers				
Trauma-informed practices that align to positive school culture				
Policies				
Awareness, Positive Classroom Culture, Intentional Instruction, Linking with Mental Health Professionals, Self-Care, Professional Development				
	Notes	Notes	Notes	Notes
Anti-bullying laws / school procedures				
School Policy/Procedures				

Appendix D

Observations: Template

Classroom Observation						
Classroom Environment	Always	Mostly	Once in a while	Never	Not observed	Notes:
Teacher Actions: (Body Language)						
got down to the students level						
smiled at students						
engaged in eye contact with students						
used students name						
Answered questions						
Respectful with students						

Among students						
Teacher Actions: (Greeting Students)						
Greeted students while they came in yes or no						
Wrapped up and sent them off feeling prepared yes or no						
Level and even tone when talking with students - giving directions - whole group instruction						
Facial expressions						
Facial expressions match the teachers words						
The expression shared with students is one that is happy to see them.						
Routines						
Teacher had established routines?						

predictable						
Students seemed to understand ...						
when to ask for help - how to ask for help						
When to sharpen pencil						
Use work time						
go to the bathroom						
where to find the learning target						
The classroom was ...						
Welcoming to all students						
a calm space						

places for students of all types (extrovert/Introvert, emotional regulation area, visually minimal)						
Student voices were valued						
Student choice was present						
Students were expected to be kind and respectful to one another						

Appendix E

Focus Groups:

Definitions:

- **Trauma:** According to the Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health (2012), trauma is a physical or psychological injury, “resulting in damage to the mind and emotions resulting from a single event or series of experiences that overwhelm a person’s ability to cope or to integrate the memories and feelings associated with the traumatic event(s)” (p. 1587). Further descriptions of trauma describe it as a response to a stressful experience in which a person’s ability to cope is reduced (Cole et al., 2005) or renders them *temporarily helpless* (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).
 - **Trauma-Sensitive Schools:** National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), “A trauma-informed school recognizes that trauma affects staff, students, families, communities, and systems. Thus organizational support, partnerships, and capacity-building are essential.”
 - **Restorative Discipline:** is a whole school relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment.
 - **Secondary Trauma:** Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first hand trauma experiences of another. (NCTSN)
-

Explanation:

Focus groups provide insights into how people think and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied.

- **Study Purpose:** Exploration: Finding out about an issue of importance from the target population. Explore trauma and trauma-informed practices from the teacher's perspective and what will need to be in place to make the transition to a more trauma- informed school.
- **Methodology:** Sampling of teachers to represent the main population being studied.

Hand out:

- Notepads and Pencils
- Questions
- List of Participants
- Name Tags
- Make sure clock is visible to everyone
- Record focus group (Making sure each participant has signed off on recording)
- Consent forms

Go over Focus Group expectations and directions

Questions:

1. Introduce yourself and what you teach and how many years you have been teaching.
2. What does trauma and trauma-informed practices mean to you as a teacher?
3. Share about a professional experience when you have learned about trauma and trauma-informed practices.
4. What impact,if any, has trauma had on your students, your classrooms, and your school buildings?

- a. From your current perspective, do you believe that trauma and struggles in learning go hand in hand? Give an example.
5. Describe any resources your school has to support you and your work with students dealing with trauma.
 - a. Can you describe some steps that have been taken to incorporate trauma-sensitive practices in your specific school buildings?
 - b. When a student is in crisis or needs support, what tools or systems of support do you feel you have as a teacher to help that student?
 - c. In a perfect world what does appropriate trauma support look like?
6. What needs to be present that is not at this point in order to help all students be successful? (what does successful mean?)
7. **Restorative Discipline** is a whole school relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment.
 - a. With this definition in mind, what do you see as positive outcomes of implementing restorative discipline practices?
 - i. What barriers do you see to implementation?
 - ii. What would this look like in practice?
 - iii. How do you know you are doing it well?
8. When working with students in trauma, what impact does that have on your life outside of school?

9. Considering secondary trauma is high in educators, what steps do you take towards self-care in order to do this job long term? What holds you back from self-care?
10. What questions do you wish I would have asked and how would you answer it?
11. Are there any items you want to circle back to from your notes?
12. Questions further developed depending on the survey results.

Probes

Tell me more...

Nonverbals

Could we go back to....?

Follow-Up

Can you step me through that...

Echo wording

How does that work?

What I am hearing you say is.....can you tell me more about that?

What motivates you to be involved in this organization?

Describe how you initially heard about, and got involved in this organization?

Appendix F

Principal Survey

Survey

Principal Survey

Trauma-Informed

Information on Survey

This study was created for the completion of a doctoral study through Hamline University, Saint Paul, Minnesota. This survey was created in order to gain an understanding of trauma and trauma-informed instruction from a teachers perspective. The survey settings are set so they will not be tracking any personal information. This means your answers will be confidential. The survey is divided into nine sections: general information, awareness, classroom culture, skills and instruction, restorative discipline, self-care, and professional development. For general understanding on classroom practice each statement is an aggregate of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. At the end of each section there is a question that asks for specific examples and descriptions of real world application. Please be aware that some of these may be pulled for written and oral descriptions. When answering the open ended questions please be specific, but also answer in a way that you would be comfortable having shared widely. This survey should take about 25 minutes to complete.

Thanks so much for adding to the greater study in trauma-informed instruction.

Instructions

Please read the questions and select "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree", "Strongly Disagree" that best describes your practice. Each section ends with a question that is a reflection of your views. Please give specific examples if possible. At the end of the survey please press submit. You know that the survey was submitted when you get the "Thank-You" message.

Are you willing to participate in this study? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Section 2 of 9

General Information

Description (optional)

Education was a large focus in my family when I was a student? *

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

My parents/guardians were very involved in my school success? *

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Would you say that your understanding of trauma is ... *

☐ Excellent

☐ Proficient

☐ Not Proficient

I believe that the training I received to become a Principal helped me to understand trauma and trauma-informed practices? *

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Why did you decide to be an administrator?

Long answer text

Awareness:

Description (optional)

I believe trauma is real and present in our schools today? *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe, trauma impacts a student's ability to learn. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe trauma impacts a student's ability to trust adults and form healthy relationships with peers. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe trauma has direct correlation to student success in the school environment. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe trauma impacts the development of a child's brain and therefore, impacts relationships, behavior, and learning. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe teaching social and emotional skills in the school environment is important so students can develop healthy ways to deal with conflict? *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe that teachers need to help build positive adult-student relationships because it is important to the repairing some of the effects trauma has on a student. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Through your experience, what is the most important aspect of working with students and why?

.....
Long answer text

Section 4 of 9

Classroom Culture:

Description (optional)

111

I believe that teaching students Social Emotional Skills will impact a student's behavior in a positive way.

Multiple choice

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Add option or [ADD "OTHER"](#)

Required ☒

I believe it is important to teach social emotional skills to students within the classroom and school environment. *

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe that the choices made in the classroom (discipline, structure, behavior) has a direct impact on how a student behaves and learns? *

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe that it is important to communicate classroom expectations in a clear, concise, and positive way. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe that goals for achievement should be consistently communicated for students. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

When conducting observations, I look for predictable routines that are attentive to transitions and sensory needs of the students. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I believe that students are more likely to perform better in classrooms where they trust the teacher and feel safe in the classroom environment. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Describe briefly what you believe the classroom culture should look and feel like when you walk into a teacher's classroom?

Long answer text

Skills and Instruction:

Description (optional)

I believe that our district principals and teachers are equipped with the skills to work with students that have a trauma background. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I can recognize when staff, parents, and or students get into a dysregulated state. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I am familiar with accommodations I can make to bring staff, parents, and students back to a regulated state. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

What instructional practices do you believe are essential for student success and should be present in your teachers classrooms?

Long answer text

Through awareness, trauma-informed schools train and equip teachers with tools to recognize when students need support and how to provide that support. Describe the training or skills you believe are essential for your staff going forward.

Long answer text

Section 6 of 9

Discipline

Description (optional)

I understand restorative discipline practices versus punitive discipline practices.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

What are the expectations around student discipline that is communicated (directly or indirectly) for teachers to follow when working with students.

Long answer text

What are the challenges you face as a principal when dealing with discipline issues or behavior issues?

Long answer text

After section 6 Continue to next section

Section 7 of 9

Linking with Mental Health Professionals

Description (optional)

The students and families we work with have a variety of needs. What resources does your school currently have that help teachers get support when working with their students?

Long answer text

What resources do you feel your school needs in order to be more effective when working with student needs?

Long answer text

Section 8 of 9

Self-Care

Description (optional)

As a principal I believe self-care is essential for anyone working with students * in trauma.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

How do you promote self-care among your teaching staff?

Long answer text

What improvements can be done to help promote self-care more effectively in your building?

Long answer text

Professional Development:

Description (optional)

To continue learning about trauma and trauma-informed practices I believe *
that some type of ongoing professional development opportunities should be
available?

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Personal reflection on teaching practices and personal beliefs are essential *
to explore in order to help teachers work with all students.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

When looking ahead to the needs of the students and families you serve, what
professional development do you believe is the most essential and why?

Long answer text

How many hours of trauma training have you received? (including Continuing *
Education credits)

1. 0-5
2. 6-10
3. 11-20
4. 20+

Personal reflection on teaching practices and personal beliefs are essential to explore in order to help teachers work with all students. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

When looking ahead to the needs of the students and families you serve, what professional development do you believe is the most essential and why?

Long answer text

How many hours of trauma training have you received? (including Continuing Education credits) *

1. 0-5
2. 6-10
3. 11-20
4. 20+

I have received training in: *

- ☐ What trauma is and who it affects
- ☐ Creating Positive Classroom Culture
- ☐ Trauma-informed Instruction
- ☐ Restorative Discipline
- ☐ Working with Mental Health Professionals in order to serve students
- ☐ The Importance of Self-Care
- ☐ Other...

I would like more training in? *

- ☐ What trauma is and who it affects
- ☐ Creating Positive Classroom Culture
- ☐ Trauma-informed Instruction
- ☐ Restorative Discipline
- ☐ Working with Mental Health Professionals in order to serve students
- ☐ The Importance of Self-Care
- ☐ Other...

Appendix G

District Strategic Priorities

